



# HOSPITALITY

## (Mirroring God's Welcome)

### INTRODUCTION

Hospitality describes the friendly and generous reception and entertainment of guests, visitors, or strangers. It's more than just providing services. Hospitality is about creating a welcoming environment where guests feel valued and appreciated. There's nothing like good hospitality. We know when we're being welcomed and treated with care and generosity and when we're not. Hospitality is at the heart of the biblical story. It is an integral part of our practice of faith. Time and time again, we see God's heart of welcome and God's commands for God's people to practice generous welcome too. This 8-part series explores the theme of Christian hospitality in hopes that followers of Jesus would do it well!

Ultimate Host/Amazing Guests

Entertaining Angels

All People

Sent to Welcome

Mutuality

Table Fellowship

It's a Practice

In the End, it Matters



# HOSPITALITY

## Ultimate Host/Amazing Guests

### Opening Prayer

God of gracious welcome, your love is expansive as is your care and provision for all you have made. We thank you for your heart of hospitality and desire for all people to experience communion with you. Empower us by your Holy Spirit to be people of gracious welcome too so that our embrace might be as big as yours and others might experience true belonging. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

### Opening Question: What makes someone a good host?

### Scripture: Genesis 1:24-31

God said, "Let the earth produce every kind of living thing: livestock, crawling things, and wildlife." And that's what happened. God made every kind of wildlife, every kind of livestock, and every kind of creature that crawls on the ground. God saw how good it was. Then God said, "Let us make humanity in our image to resemble us so that they may take charge of the fish of the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the earth, and all the crawling things on earth." God created humanity in God's own image, in the divine image God created them, male and female God created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and master it. Take charge of the fish of the sea, the birds in the sky, and everything crawling on the ground." Then God said, "I now give to you all the plants on the earth that yield seeds and all the trees whose fruit produces its seeds within it. These will be your food. To all wildlife, to all the birds in the sky, and to everything crawling on the ground—to everything that breathes—I give all the green grasses for food." And that's what happened. God saw everything he had made: it was supremely good. There was evening and there was morning: the sixth day.

### Discussion

1. Looking at this passage through the lens of host and guest, how is God as Creator a host?
2. What are the ways God is demonstrating hospitality here?
3. What can we learn from God as a gracious host in the creation story?
4. What is the relationship between gracious provision and hospitality?
5. God creates human beings in God's image. What does that mean about how God views us?
6. What does that mean for how we view other people (guests) when we are the "host?"
7. As image bearers, how might we represent God's hospitality better in the world?

### Big Idea

God's creation is designed for the flourishing of life. It is a stage for God's love to abound. God the Creator is a host creating a good world welcoming to human beings as image bearers. God has given us what we need to live and thrive. As image bearers, we not only are called to represent God's hospitality, but to recognize the inherent value in every human being we encounter whether we are host or guest!



# HOSPITALITY

## Entertaining Angels

### Opening Prayer

God of gracious welcome, your love is expansive as is your care and provision for all you have made. We thank you for your heart of hospitality and desire for all people to experience communion with you. Empower us by your Holy Spirit to be people of gracious welcome too so that our embrace might be as big as yours and others might experience true belonging. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

**Opening Question:** When was a time you were surprised by someone's gracious welcome?

**Scripture:** Genesis 18:1-8

The Lord appeared to Abraham at the oaks of Mamre while he sat at the entrance of his tent in the day's heat. He looked up and suddenly saw three men standing near him. As soon as he saw them, he ran from his tent entrance to greet them and bowed deeply. He said, "Sirs, if you would be so kind, don't just pass by your servant. Let a little water be brought so you may wash your feet and refresh yourselves under the tree. Let me offer you a little bread so you will feel stronger, and after that you may leave your servant and go on your way—since you have visited your servant." They responded, "Fine. Do just as you have said." So Abraham hurried to Sarah at his tent and said, "Hurry! Knead three seahs of the finest flour and make some baked goods!" Abraham ran to the cattle, took a healthy young calf, and gave it to a young servant, who prepared it quickly. Then Abraham took butter, milk, and the calf that had been prepared, put the food in front of them, and stood under the tree near them as they ate.

### Discussion

1. If you just read the first sentence, what kind of appearance from God might you expect?
2. Why was hospitality so important in this scripture passage? What were the conditions?
3. How do we see Abraham and Sarah practicing hospitality? What different actions do they do?
4. What might have been things that could have prevented Abraham from offering hospitality in this case? Are they some of the same things that might hinder us?
5. What connection is being made here between God and those to whom we might extend hospitality?
6. How does hospitality here not just welcome strangers but recognize their holiness?
7. What would have to be true for our hospitality to do that too?

### Big Idea

It's the heat of the day in the wilderness. Abraham is sitting at the entrance of his tent and sees three strangers approaching. His instinct is to jump up and offer gracious hospitality to them. Not only does he welcome them, care for them and provide for their needs, he also recognizes their innate holiness and honors them. Part of the lesson of this passage is precisely that. True hospitality doesn't just welcome strangers, it recognizes their holiness too.



# HOSPITALITY

All People

## Opening Prayer

God of gracious welcome, your love is expansive as is your care and provision for all you have made. We thank you for your heart of hospitality and desire for all people to experience communion with you. Empower us by your Holy Spirit to be people of gracious welcome too so that our embrace might be as big as yours and others might experience true belonging. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

**Opening Question:** When was a time when you felt cautious or unsure about whether or not you would be welcomed?

**Scripture:** Isaiah 56:1-8

The Lord says: Act justly and do what is righteous, because my salvation is coming soon, and my righteousness will be revealed. Happy is the one who does this, the person who holds it fast, who keeps the Sabbath, not making it impure, and avoids doing any evil. Don't let the immigrant who has joined with the Lord say, "The Lord will exclude me from the people." And don't let the eunuch say, "I'm just a dry tree." The Lord says: To the eunuchs who keep my sabbaths, choose what I desire, and remain loyal to my covenant. In my temple and courts, I will give them a monument and a name better than sons and daughters. I will give to them an enduring name that won't be removed. The immigrants who have joined me, serving me and loving my name, becoming my servants, everyone who keeps the Sabbath without making it impure, and those who hold fast to my covenant: I will bring them to my holy mountain, and bring them joy in my house of prayer. I will accept their entirely burned offerings and sacrifices on my altar. My house will be known as a house of prayer for all peoples, says the Lord God, who gathers Israel's outcasts. I will gather still others to those I have already gathered.

## Discussion

1. What language/description of hospitality do you see in the scripture passage?
2. How do you think Israelites heard these words? How do you think immigrants and eunuchs heard these words?
3. What is the relationship between gathering and hospitality here? Between worship and hospitality?
4. What do you think God was trying to communicate to God's people through the prophet Isaiah in this scripture passage?
5. How do you understand the idea of God gathering "still others" to those God has already gathered? What does that mean for the church today?
6. What would have to be true for your faith community or your place of worship truly to be for "all people?"

## Big Idea

This passage gives a hint of God's expansive vision of who is welcome in God's place of worship. To be a house of prayer for "all people" meant groups who may have been considered "outsiders" were welcome including foreigners and Eunuchs. Our right worship of God in our places of worship is tied to the way in which we show hospitality to those who come into our doors. We must embody God's welcome in our worship practices and spaces.



# HOSPITALITY

Sent to Welcome

## Opening Prayer

God of gracious welcome, your love is expansive as is your care and provision for all you have made. We thank you for your heart of hospitality and desire for all people to experience communion with you. Empower us by your Holy Spirit to be people of gracious welcome too so that our embrace might be as big as yours and others might experience true belonging. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

**Opening Question:** What do you think is the worst thing to run out of at a banquet or party?

**Scripture:** John 2:1-11

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the celebration. When the wine ran out, Jesus' mother said to him, "They don't have any wine." Jesus replied, "Woman, what does that have to do with me? My time hasn't come yet." His mother told the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." Nearby were six stone water jars used for the Jewish cleansing ritual, each able to hold about twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water," and they filled them to the brim. Then he told them, "Now draw some from them and take it to the headwaiter," and they did. The headwaiter tasted the water that had become wine. He didn't know where it came from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. The headwaiter called the groom and said, "Everyone serves the good wine first. They bring out the second-rate wine only when the guests are drinking freely. You kept the good wine until now." This was the first miraculous sign that Jesus did in Cana of Galilee. He revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him.

## Discussion

1. What do you think was the expected hospitality at a wedding banquet in Jesus' day?
2. What do you think might have happened if the wine had truly run out? In other words, what is the concern in Mary's voice?
3. How does Jesus practice hospitality in this story?
4. Why do you think Jesus never troubles the host with this but only communicates with the servants?
5. How does hospitality lead to transformation in this story? How might it in our lives today?
6. In John's gospel, Jesus' miracles are called "signs." What is the sign here?
7. Jesus the guest brings surprising gifts and even becomes the host in this story. What can we learn from that in our own practice of hospitality?

## Big Idea

Jesus' miracles in John's gospel are called "signs." The first sign in John's gospel is Jesus turning water into wine at a wedding celebration in Cana. This sign points directly to Jesus being the very embodiment of God's hospitality. Jesus is God's "sent hospitality." Jesus doesn't wait for people to come to him to show hospitality, he engages in the practice wherever he finds himself and transformation happens. We are likewise sent to welcome. We are to practice "sent hospitality" creating spaces for people to experience community with God and others at all times!



# HOSPITALITY

## Mutuality

### Opening Prayer

God of gracious welcome, your love is expansive as is your care and provision for all you have made. We thank you for your heart of hospitality and desire for all people to experience communion with you. Empower us by your Holy Spirit to be people of gracious welcome too so that our embrace might be as big as yours and others might experience true belonging. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

**Opening Question:** When was a memorable time of being on the receiving end of incredible hospitality?

**Scripture:** Luke 9:1-6

Jesus called the Twelve together and he gave them power and authority over all demons and to heal sicknesses. He sent them out to proclaim God's kingdom and to heal the sick. He told them, "Take nothing for the journey—no walking stick, no bag, no bread, no money, not even an extra shirt. Whatever house you enter, remain there until you leave that place. Wherever they don't welcome you, as you leave that city, shake the dust off your feet as a witness against them." They departed and went through the villages proclaiming the good news and healing people everywhere.

### Discussion

1. Why do you think Jesus told the disciples not to take anything on the journey?
2. Why did Jesus instruct them to remain at a house until they leave that place?
3. What were the instructions if they experienced a lack of hospitality?
4. How might the hospitality of a host provide space for proclaiming the good news of God's Kingdom?
5. What is dignifying or special about being able to offer hospitality?
6. Do you think we become better at extending hospitality by also being able to receive it well from others? Why or why not?
7. In good hospitality, the lines between giver and receiver are blurred. How might that be true in this passage? How might that be true in our own practice?

### Big Idea

Jesus sent out his followers to go and preach the good news of the Kingdom. To preach the good news of a Kingdom where one of the primary values was God's radical welcome meant the disciples depending on the welcome of others. Hospitality is often most powerful and beautiful when the lines between host and guest, between giver and receiver become blurred. Mutuality is important in Christian hospitality. Our ability to be on the receiving end of another's hospitality helps cultivate relationships where the good news can be shared and helps us become more hospitable people too.



# HOSPITALITY

## Table Fellowship

### Opening Prayer

God of gracious welcome, your love is expansive as is your care and provision for all you have made. We thank you for your heart of hospitality and desire for all people to experience communion with you. Empower us by your Holy Spirit to be people of gracious welcome too so that our embrace might be as big as yours and others might experience true belonging. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

**Opening Question:** If you could share a meal with any person or group of people, who would you choose?

**Scripture:** Matthew 9:10-13

While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

### Discussion

1. Jesus has just invited Matthew the tax collector to follow him. Why do you think Matthew has Jesus and friends over to his house for dinner?
2. How are shared meals an expression of hospitality?
3. What do you think Jesus is doing by sharing table fellowship with "tax collectors and sinners?"
4. What lies behind the question the Pharisees seem to be asking in disgust or anger?
5. Jesus makes two statements in this passage. What do you think each one means?
6. How might they connect to the practice of hospitality?
7. Jesus welcomes us even as sinners to his table of fellowship. How does that truth inform our own practice of hospitality?
8. Jesus has a knack for noticing who doesn't have a place at the table and welcoming them. What might that look like for us?

### Big Idea

There is something about shared meals that expresses hospitality in beautiful ways. Matthew demonstrates hospitality toward Jesus out of the joy of being welcomed and called by him. Jesus welcomes other tax collectors and "sinners" to eat with them too. Around that table, those who were outcasts had a place with Jesus. We, as imperfect and flawed people, also have a place at Jesus' table of fellowship. We experience the hospitality of Jesus every time we sit down to eat with others and are aware of Jesus' presence in our midst. Those who know themselves to be welcomed by Jesus become the kind of people who extend that welcome.



# HOSPITALITY

## The Pursuit

### Opening Prayer

God of gracious welcome, your love is expansive as is your care and provision for all you have made. We thank you for your heart of hospitality and desire for all people to experience communion with you. Empower us by your Holy Spirit to be people of gracious welcome too so that our embrace might be as big as yours and others might experience true belonging. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

**Opening Question:** What is something you've had to practice a lot?

**Scripture:** Romans 12:13; 1 Peter 4:9

Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.

### A Quick Lesson in Greek

- The word translated “practice” literally means “pursue” or “chase after.” In fact, in other places in the New Testament, it’s actually the same word used for “persecution” (pursuing someone for their beliefs).
- The Greek word for hospitality is made up of two words: “love” and “stranger,” literally, “love of stranger.”

### Discussion

1. What is significant about Paul imploring Christians to “practice” or “pursue” hospitality?
2. What does it look like to pursue or chase after hospitality?
3. Why is pursuing hospitality paired with sharing with those in need?
4. How does knowing that hospitality literally means “love of strangers” add to the weight of these passages and others like them?
5. Why do you think the writer of 1 Peter adds in the “without grumbling” part?
6. What connection might we make between the posture of our heart and the way we offer hospitality?
7. How do we navigate the tension between hospitality as a “duty” for followers of Jesus but also a great joy?

### Big Idea

Hospitality for Christians is not simply an attitude or a theory but something to be practiced and pursued. In other words, we need to seek it out and prioritize it in our lives so that it becomes just as much of a habit as brushing our teeth. At the same time it becomes a habit, it should never be done out of a sense of dull or begrudging duty, but out of joy-filled opportunity to give tangible expression to Christ's love—especially with people who may be different or unfamiliar to us.





# HOSPITALITY

**It Matters in the End**

## **Opening Prayer**

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**Opening Question:** Do you have an experience of “welcoming the stranger?”

**Scripture:** Matthew 25:31-40

“Now when the Human One comes in his majesty and all his angels are with him, he will sit on his majestic throne. All the nations will be gathered in front of him. He will separate them from each other, just as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right side. But the goats he will put on his left. “Then the king will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who will receive good things from my Father. Inherit the kingdom that was prepared for you before the world began. I was hungry and you gave me food to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me. I was naked and you gave me clothes to wear. I was sick and you took care of me. I was in prison and you visited me.’ “Then those who are righteous will reply to him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you a drink? When did we see you as a stranger and welcome you, or naked and give you clothes to wear? When did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ “Then the king will reply to them, ‘I assure you that when you have done it for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you have done it for me.’

## **Discussion**

1. What are some of the ways our world or culture evaluates a good or successful life?
2. What seem to be the measuring sticks here in this passage?
3. How do you understand the profound mystery that in offering hospitality to others, we offer it to Jesus?
4. How is Jesus present in the act of welcoming the stranger?
5. We often shy away from texts that speak about judgment. How does that factor into how we approach and understand the gravity of hospitality here?
6. If this is presented as a test of our welcome of Jesus, how are we doing as a church or society? How are you doing personally?

## **Big Idea**

It's a wonderful mystery but it's not complicated. When we show hospitality to others, we do it to Jesus. When we fail to do so, we fail to do it to Jesus. In the end, it matters a great deal. What a gift to be able to encounter Jesus in those to whom we offer hospitality! And, what a challenge! It is much safer to think of Jesus' presence as something that can be clearly located: in communion, in the preaching of the gospel, in the body of the Church. A Jesus who can come to us as the unrecognized stranger is challenging. How can we welcome such a King? What a challenge to think that part of our judgment will include how well we welcomed the stranger!



# HOSPITALITY

## (Mirroring God's Welcome)

### **Wrap-Up**

What is the biggest thing God is saying to you after this study and these conversations?

What are you going to do about it?

What are your next steps?