



open doors. open hearts.

Exploring biblical hospitality



**SPIRITUAL
LIFE DEVELOPMENT**
INTERNATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

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A gift, a command,
a reflection of the gospel.

Hospitality is not just the responsibility of those who welcome congregations into church or serve refreshments after the service. Nor is it reserved for those who receive hospitality as a spiritual gift.

We are *all* called to extend hospitality to those around us.

Biblical hospitality is both action and affection. It is receiving and serving others with our hands and our hearts, inviting them into the family of God. With open doors and open hearts, we can welcome others into a space where they are seen, where they are loved and where they are valued. Into a space where they can meet with Jesus and discover the fullness of life as God intended.

As followers of Jesus, we are to extend that invitation to everyone; to those we know and those we don't, to those who are like us and those who are not.

In this eight day series, we invite you to take a closer look at examples and stories of hospitality found in the Bible and make time reflect on how you can practice hospitality well with your own life.

Each day you will read from Scripture, followed by a short thought.

After reading, take some time to reflect or discuss your response to what you have read, using the questions provided to guide you.

Close your reflection in prayer. Ask God to reveal something new to you today.

Disruption.

Luke 13:10-17

A woman comes to worship. She's literally bent over at the waist. She can't stand upright. Her eyes are permanently downcast and have been for almost a lifetime. As a *woman* in this society, she is a piece of property that has no power. As a woman *crippled by an evil spirit* – she has been declared sinful and a threat to the religious community... and yet, she's still coming to worship. She has not abandoned her faith or her God.

Jesus sees her and says – '*Behold a woman.*'

Be-hold: Focus! Pay attention!

For 18 years, people have avoided her like the plague – both with their eyes and their touch – and yet, Jesus sees her; brings her into the centre of the faith community; speaks to her and gathers her in a healing God embrace. She is restored.

When Jesus calls her a 'Daughter of Abraham', he gives her honour, dignity and social status. How outrageous!

The hospitality (on the Sabbath!) and the resulting miracle are not received well by the religious leaders. Scripture and the Law have clashed with love and hospitality.

Can you imagine the scene? A woman bent over is set free and stands upright. A woman from the margins strides to the centre of the synagogue – and she dances!

Talk about a disruption!

Being hospitable involves seeing and calling to the centre the unloved, the disfigured, the stranger – those on the margins. It involves wrapping them in a warm God embrace and speaking words of respect, value and honour over them. It is here that the divine, transforming power of hospitality is displayed. It is here that healing, wholeness and hope are offered.

Colonel Donna Evans

Disruption.

For reflection:

Who is on the edge, on the margins of our faith communities?

Who needs us to see them, call them forward, include, embrace and honour them?

What are the barriers in our faith community that stop people from coming to Jesus?

A prayer for today:

Lord give me eyes to see; a loving heart to embrace and include others; and the courage to offer hospitality... even when it causes a disruption.

AMEN

Consideration of others.

Genesis 18:6-8 Luke 10:30-37 Isaiah 58:7 Galatians 6:10
Matthew 10:40-42 Luke 14:12-14 1 Peter 4:9

Hospitality is the consideration of others that allows us to welcome God in person, demonstrating our love for others. All people are created in the image of God, with the same human needs and longings. When we approach others with compassion and openness to listen to their experience, we will better understand their needs.

A guest may arrive tired, hungry or sometimes wounded. To restore them with food and rest is a duty. We see the response of Abraham to unfamiliar guests in Genesis 18 and the response of the Good Samaritan to the wounded stranger in the parable Jesus shared with his disciples in Luke 10. To welcome and respond to the needs of others is a specific command from God and an instruction Jesus made so clear to his first disciples (Matthew 10:40-42).

In practice, offering hospitality may not always feel easy. But as followers of Jesus, we must rise above the difficulties encountered.

We can become reluctant to open our doors and welcome in those who have caused hurt or disappointment. When extending hospitality feels difficult, we can call out to God for his help to fulfil this duty, to replace our hesitancy with conviction and judgement with compassion. In our context, the Congolese are truly hospitable not only towards their peers but also towards those who are poor or disadvantaged and towards strangers.

Hospitality is an attitude that teaches us how to open our hearts to others without grumbling or complaining, to receive them considerately, to listen to them and to provide lodging and food without recompense.

When we limit our hospitality, we deprive ourselves of God's joy.

Major Louise Mavouna
and Commissioner Jane Paone

Consideration of others.

For reflection:

How willing am I to open my heart to others and offer hospitality freely?

A prayer for today:

Loving Heavenly Father, awaken my heart to your love so that I can welcome others into my life, wherever I may be and whoever I may encounter today.

AMEN

Acceptance.

Luke 10:25-37

Christian hospitality goes beyond simple gestures of kindness; it represents fundamental acceptance of others, regardless of their history, beliefs, or circumstances. Acceptance does not depend on how much or how little we know about the person before us.

One of the most well-known instructions to show hospitality is found in the New Testament book of Hebrews: 'Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing so, some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it' (Hebrews 13:2). This instruction is not unfounded.

In Genesis 18, we read of Abraham's humble and generous display of hospitality to three strangers. Wealthy and aged, Abraham could have easily called on one of his many servants to tend to the three unannounced visitors. Yet Abraham generously gave them the best he had. There is so much we don't know about these guests. Abraham and Sarah didn't know who they were either. But their response was a response of fundamental acceptance.

And, as it turned out, they had welcomed the Lord and two angels.

When welcoming strangers, those we don't know, we may unintentionally invite heavenly presence into our midst – how incredible!

In Luke 10, we find the parable of the Good Samaritan. This parable depicts a Samaritan's humanitarian response towards a wounded stranger, a response which surpasses ethnic and religious boundaries.

The Samaritan didn't stop to decide if this wounded stranger was his neighbour before he showed love; he didn't consider his nationality, ethnicity, status, or cleanness. He was the neighbour and that's what counted.

True hospitality has no bounds and involves a willingness to accept even those who appear to be outsiders. There are no outsiders to the love of God. And there is no qualification needed to receive or to offer hospitality.

Major Arif Masih

Acceptance.

For reflection:

Do you cultivate a spirit of hospitality that mirrors the unconditional acceptance demonstrated by Christ?

A prayer for today:

May the Lord grant us the grace to extend hospitality rooted in genuine acceptance, following the example of Christ who welcomed all with love and compassion.

AMEN

A flow of grace.

Luke 9: 51-56 Luke 10:25-37 John 4:1-38

I find the way that the gospel writers describe Jesus' interactions with the Samaritans endlessly compelling. Without doubt, as he grew up in Nazareth, Jesus would have encountered the biases and prejudices of his community toward their neighbours. Jews and Samaritans had grievances against one another that went back centuries. Ethnic rivalries, religious differences and political posturing separated them and occasionally flared into violence.

It is telling, then, that when we observe how Jesus interacts and speaks about Samaritans it is completely counter-cultural: he chastises his disciples for getting angry when they are snubbed by Samaritan villagers (Luke 9:51-56); his most famous parable has a Samaritan as the hero and the one to be emulated (Luke 10:25-37); he sits and shares a drink alone with a Samaritan woman (John 4:1-38). In all these examples, the Jewish onlookers are scandalised.

For us today, we should ask ourselves, what was Jesus doing here?

When we view Jesus' engagement with the Samaritans through the lens of hospitality, we begin to see something extraordinary. In his desire to open himself up to another person, he is willing to break with convention – he practices proximity with the 'unclean', he shares his table with 'outsiders', and he recognises God at work in the 'unbeliever'. As a result of this, enemies become neighbours, strangers are seen as a gift, and 'the other' becomes an agent of God's grace.

Jesus' example of hospitality also calls us to open our hearts to others, whoever they are, in radical ways. In doing so, we can expect a sacred space to open which allows the grace of God to flow through the Holy Spirit. This, then, will become a place of transformation.

Lieut-Colonel Nick Coke

A flow of grace.

For reflection:

Can you think of a time when offering unconditional hospitality created space for the grace of God to flow?

What happened?

A prayer for today:

Dear Lord, thank you for showing us what hospitality looks like. Help us to open our hearts to others in radical ways and, in so doing, create space for your grace to flow.

AMEN

An act of justice.

Leviticus 19:33-34 Matthew 25:31-40

Hospitality is an act of kingdom justice; it involves seeing someone and their needs and acting on a desire to respond. Not just so that they may survive but so they may flourish and experience shalom.*

Kingdom justice is about inviting strangers to become part of our lives and becoming part of theirs. Strangers, those who may be different from us in many ways, those from other countries or with different backgrounds, cultures or languages, may be the hardest for us to offer welcome. But if we are to follow the example of Jesus and honour the command of God, we need to reach out to those who may feel unwelcome in the world with the warm embrace of a community that can demonstrate God's love, mindful that whatever we do to 'the least of these', we are doing unto the Lord (Matthew 25:40). This may involve acts of traditional hospitality such as sharing a meal – but it is more.

In Leviticus 19:33–34, God gives a clear instruction that we are not to mistreat

foreigners residing in our land, but to treat them as natives, loving them as ourselves. To offer them 'home'.

Home is not a place; it is a relationship.

It is not easy being a foreigner – not knowing what behaviour is normal, what attire is acceptable or how to navigate the tasks of everyday life.

As followers of Jesus, we should demonstrate love and patience with the stranger in our midst. To the one counting slowly in an unfamiliar currency at the cash desk, to the one laden with heavy bags who needs a little extra time to navigate airport security, to the one uttering a few broken words in a foreign language. We should welcome them in love and offer them a 'home' with us.

This is kingdom justice at its best – living right and righting wrong.

Colonel Wendy Swan

* 'Shalom' is a Hebrew word and Jewish greeting, often translated as 'peace', which refers to wholeness and rightness. It means connectedness with others. With creation. With God.

An act of justice.

For reflection:

How do I welcome the stranger in my midst (neighbourhood, school, community)?

In what ways does God reveal himself to me through the stranger?

A prayer for today:

Dear Lord, help me to see the stranger and the foreigner through your eyes. May I demonstrate love and patience as I endeavour to build relationships with them.

AMEN

Embracing everyone.

Luke 19:1-3

Across The Salvation Army world, the tradition of sharing a cup of tea is important. These occasions give us time to relax, engage and get to know each other. Taking the time to enjoy tea together also creates an opportunity to share sacred space. Later in this biblical passage, Jesus asks to sit down at the table with Zacchaeus. People in the wider story questioned why Jesus would make such a request. Zacchaeus was not everyone's favourite 'tea' partner.

People living with disabilities sometimes find themselves left to take tea on their own. A friend of mine noticed that after services at The Salvation Army, people did not choose to sit down at the morning tea table with her sister. Her precious sister lived with a disability and was not always easy to understand.

While this sister was not excluded from the morning tea – her presence was not really appreciated. Theologian, John Swinton, reminds us that, 'Jesus sat with those folks that society did not want to sit with.'¹

Choosing who we sit with communicates to the person and the wider world that we appreciate their company and their experience of the world. Faithful hospitality accepts that both sets of people sitting around the teapot reflect the image of God and have gifts to share with each other. Choosing to sit with someone who appears different to ourselves is a key marker of Christ's pattern of hospitality.

Coralie Bridle

¹ John Swinton, "Using Our Bodies Faithfully: Christian Friendship and the Life of Worship," *Journal of Disability & Religion* 19 (2015): 239.

Embracing everyone.

For reflection:

As you think about your own context, who are the people that Jesus might ask to have tea with today?

How might you pursue faithful hospitality with disabled people in your community?

A prayer for today:

Father, help me to see the image of God reflected in every face I encounter. Guide me to move beyond welcome statements and towards hospitality that seeks to build relationships.

AMEN

A display of generosity.

Luke 10:38-42

A guest in most African contexts is welcome at any time without a prior appointment. A Zimbabwean Shona proverb, 'mueni haapedzi dura' means 'a guest does not exhaust your reserves'. This highlights the truth that sharing what you have with others, including a stranger or an uninvited guest, won't cause you to suffer a major loss. A Rwandese proverb, 'Umushyitsi akurisha imbuto', means 'a visitor makes you cook seeds reserved for planting'. When you use your best and most precious resources serving visitors, you get to enjoy those special resources too.

In Luke 10:38-42, we read the story of Jesus at the home of Martha and Mary, a story that speaks to generous hospitality as understood in my African context. Jesus was on his way and decided to enter Martha and Mary's home without prior arrangements, yet a generous welcome was still extended. This demonstrates that hospitality should not be based on the abundance of our resources but rather on the needs of

those we welcome. Hospitality, in this context, goes beyond merely offering a meal; it signifies a readiness to care, support, welcome, and be available.

In the world, there are some who have more than enough to spare, yet are reluctant to part with what they have. There are others who have only just enough and find it hard to invite others in to share. Whether we have a store full of resources or only a little left in our cupboard, we are called to throw open our doors and welcome guests in anyway. Jesus calls us to be available to serve, even when we feel unprepared or under-resourced. He asks to provide for others when there is a need, not just when it is convenient or comfortable for us.

True hospitality as generosity stems from a generous heart and caring love that wishes the best for everyone, including strangers.

Lieut-Colonel Celestin Ayabagabo
and Colonel Bishow Samhika

A display of generosity.

For reflection:

Reflecting on this short story, what motivates your acts of hospitality today?

Does your hospitality demonstrate your preparedness, availability and willingness to serve others without limitations?

A prayer for today:

Dear Lord, as I consider those who may unexpectedly show up on my doorstep, help me to show them a kind of hospitality that is generous... a kind that extends love and care and a desire to welcome them as an expression of your boundless love and grace.

AMEN

A way of life.

Romans 12:9-21 Luke 10: 38-42 Acts 18:2-3
Genesis 18:1-8 Acts 9:36 Ruth 2:8-16

God cares *for* his people *through* his people.

In this series, we have reflected on some examples of hospitality found in the Bible and the call to extend hospitality without grumbling and with generosity, not only to our own guests but also to saints and strangers.

As believers and part of the Body of Christ, we reflect Christ's likeness and God's love when we offer hospitality generously. Imagine a world where we are all devoted to opening doors, to honouring others above ourselves and sharing with one another!

Hospitality is more than an occasional practice; it is a way of life. Romans 12:9-21 outlines the characteristics of Christian hospitality. It requires our time, finances, our skills and other resources to be shared with kindness and respect. It demands sacrifice. It is love in action.

Scripture tells us that Jesus, his disciples and the prophets were welcomed into many homes with love, courtesy and extraordinary kindness.

Martha and Mary offered generous hospitality to Jesus (Luke 10:38-42). Priscilla and Aquila welcomed Paul (Acts 18:2-3). Sarah and Abraham showed hospitality to their visitors (Genesis 18).

Tabitha showed kindness through her deeds (Acts 9:36), and Boaz exhibited exceptional generosity and kindness towards Ruth (Ruth 2:8-16). The list goes on.

The Bible is the foundation of Christian living, and from the multitude of examples shared in the Word of God, we can learn that practicing hospitality means accepting people, sharing with them, providing for their needs according to God's mercy, and treating them with respect.

We praise God for The Salvation Army, who practices hospitality with generous hands among those in need, suffering communities, and refugees. And all to bring glory, honour, and praise to God so that people may know the saving grace of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. This should be our ultimate goal.

Hospitality can be lived out by individuals, with others in our families, workplaces and communities, and certainly within the Church. But let us never try to do it on our own. Let us depend upon God, His Son Jesus Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit as we open our doors and our hearts to others in love.

Captain Dorothy Macwan

A way of life.

For reflection:

Are we truly practicing hospitality with love, compassion, and generosity, or are we merely going through the motions without heartfelt intention?

A prayer for today:

Dear Heavenly Father, in your mercy and love, may we offer hospitality to all, with generosity for your glory and honour for your Kingdom's sake, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

In Jesus' Name,

AMEN



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