

Introduction

Welcome to this new study, friends!

A recent nationwide survey asked this question: Is your church a friendly church? 97% of church members who responded said, “Yes, we are a very friendly church.” *Then* the survey asked the same question of first-time guests of those same churches: “Was this a friendly church?” You won’t believe the response. Only **3%** of guests described the churches as being friendly!

97%...versus 3%. Members versus guests. Insiders versus outsiders. You realize what those numbers convey, right? Those of us on the inside ARE friendly...to each other. But in 97% of the churches out there, that hospitality does not spill out onto the newcomer.

I don’t think this is purposeful! I just think we love our friends and enjoy talking with them. But the outcome can be pretty painful. Most people who screw up the courage to walk into a church for the first time *do not* experience hospitality. Most of them do not feel welcome.

For the next few weeks, we will be in a sermon series titled, “YOUR Welcome.” Yes, I know “your” is misspelled. On purpose. I am asking the question, “How is YOUR welcome to outsiders? How well are YOU reflecting the heart of God in greeting the newcomer who walks through our doors?” As we will discover, this matters deeply to the Lord. I hope it will matter to us, too! And I hope, by the time we are done, “YOUR welcome” will be warmer, more intentional, and more heartfelt than ever.

Thanks for diving in!



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From Pastor Megan: Many thanks to those who contributed to the writing and editing of this study including Larry Hackman, Jena Meyerpeter, Tina Picard, Judson Taylor, Rachel Toone, Bekah Ueland, Mel Watt, Rachel White, and Brianna Showalter as designer. You each help us encounter Jesus by lending your voice to our study of God’s word. Thank you for the generous offering of your time, study, and writing.

How to Use This Guide

WEEKLY

BIBLE
PASSAGE

SERMON
NOTES

LIFEGROUP
GUIDE

DAILY
REFLECTION

The book is laid out as if your week looked like:

Sermon, then LifeGroup, then your study

- Saturday/Sunday – Sermon notes
- Tuesday – LifeGroup Guide Week 1
- Wednesday through Monday – Do the five days of daily study for Week 1

That may not be your rhythm! So adapt as needed. Talk with your LifeGroup Leader. Alternatives might be:

Sermon, then your study, then LifeGroup

- Sunday – Take Sermon Notes
- Monday through Friday – Do the five days of daily study for Week 1
- Saturday – LifeGroup Guide Week 1

Or your own study, then the sermon, then LifeGroup

- Monday through Friday – Do the five days of daily study for Week 1
- Saturday – Sermon notes
- Sunday – LifeGroup Week 1

DAILY

1. **CALL TO WORSHIP:** The daily call to worship is a chance to start your conversation with God.
2. **READ:** Every day you'll read some of the week's passage and at times you'll read other texts in the Bible that help us understand what we are reading in. When I find a passage confusing, I usually find *The Message* helps me understand the passage in more common language. Use biblegateway.com to look up other translations.

3. REFLECT: Apply your mind to some thoughtful reflection on the Bible and your own life. Some of the commentary was written by Chapel Hill folks or quoted from scholars. The questions written will be as meaningful as you make them. Give yourself some time and space to write and think. Ask God to use these reflections to make you more like him.
4. APPLY: God doesn't just speak to us when we sit still and study. So we've created some ways to help you take this study with you as you go. I hope you find God speaking to you more and more throughout the day as you try new practices.
5. PRAY: Let this weekly prayer settle in day by day. Try reading it out-loud one day. Write it in your handwriting another. Speak to God the same prayer morning and night. See how the words grow in their meaning to you as you consistently pray them.

RESOURCES

STUDY BIBLES: What's the difference between a Bible and a Study Bible? A Bible is the translated Scriptures from the original Hebrew (Old Testament) and Greek (New Testament). Because we have a lot of academics who speak English, we have a lot of translations! Chapel Hill typically uses the English Standard Version but if you have a Bible with letters like NIV, NKJV, CRV, etc – it's probably a good one! We have printed the ESV next to the sermon notes so that you can have the translation the pastor is preaching from to follow along.

A Study Bible is going to be a thicker Bible because scholars have added their interpretation of the Bible. They are full of resources like maps, book summaries, verse-by-verse interpretation, Q&A, and cross-references (short-hand Bible references for similar passages). These Bibles are very helpful! If you have a Study Bible at home, open to a favorite passage and see if what they have added is helpful. If it is, stick with it! If you're looking for one, we particularly like:

- ESV Study Bible – Good for you if you'd say, "I know my way around the Bible and want to go deeper." They have great scholars who assume you know Christian terms.
- Quest Study Bible—Good for you if you'd say, "I've never had a Study Bible and this will be my first time reading the Bible on my own." They answer the most commonly asked questions in the margin. It's in the NIV, New International Version.

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John 1:40-42

⁴⁰ One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. ⁴¹ He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which means Christ). ⁴² He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas" (which means Peter).

John 12:20-22

²⁰ Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. ²¹ So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." ²² Philip went and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus.

LifeGroup Guide

John 1:40-42 & John 12:20-22

Intro

Many of us know about Peter and his role in the early church, but how often do we stop to consider Andrew, his brother? Today's passages show us the eternal significance of behind-the-scenes work and the power of a simple invitation.

As you read today's passages, think about when you have been persuaded by someone who has invited you to "come and see." How often has a friend invited you to meet a friend of theirs and it has resulted in a mutual friendship? As you look back was there someone significant in your faith journey who made an invitation to you to explore faith or meet Jesus for the first time? Reflect on the valuable contribution this person has made to your life. How might you also join in the simple but powerful work of inviting others to meet Jesus?



What does Andrew do as a result of following Jesus personally?

How does Andrew reflect the character of the invitational God?

What is the significance of this moment of invitation in John 12:20-22 in the early church?



Who is/was significant in your faith commitment and journey?

When have you brought someone to Jesus? This could be in terms of a first commitment to follow Jesus or supporting someone in a significant moment of growth in their walk with him.

When have you seen someone brought to Jesus as a result of the efforts of multiple people, like in John 12:20-22? What role did each of the people play in this story?



Who is in your life right now who may be open to an invitation to come meet Jesus? What's the next step to encourage them to move in that direction?

Spend some time in prayer for each individual in your group to have eyes to see those they could be inviting into deeper relationship with Jesus. Pray for meaningful friendships, spiritual conversations, courage to invite people to church, and the wisdom to know the right moment to make the invitation.

Radical Welcome: Where Hospitality Starts

DAY 1

**“Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles,
and let all the peoples extol him.”**

Romans 15:11/Psalm 117:1

Read

Romans 15:7

I NOTICED: _____

Reflect

If you're looking for the ultimate example of hospitality, look no further than Boston Italians. It oozes from their pores. During my [Rachel Toone] time in Boston, my restaurant boss invited me to Thanksgiving dinner—with the ENTIRE family. Donna answered the door when I arrived. She radiated warmth, and had created the kind of house where you instantly felt at home. It wasn't long before I was chatting at the bar with the women and eating cannoli pie (yes, it's a thing) while the men smoked outside. As we drove away, to my surprise my boss and his wife had tears in their eyes. Confused, I asked what was wrong. "You're the same age our daughter would've been—she died when she was four. For the first time in 15 years, it felt like our whole family was together."

"Welcome" is a word that has lost steam in Western culture. Too often it conjures up an image of instructing people where to take

off their shoes and hang up their coats. But this is not the biblical understanding of “welcome” at all. In fact, the word Paul uses in Romans 15:7 literally means “to receive into one’s home and circle of acquaintances, to bring along with oneself.” Scripture talks about a radical understanding of welcome—from the inclusion of the Gentiles into God’s plan, to the inclusion of sinners into God’s family. When Paul says that Christ has “welcomed you,” he doesn’t mean Jesus handed you a drink and told you where to leave your purse. He is saying that Jesus has taken you into his heart, his family, his world in a completely irreplaceable way. You have been brought so deeply in that your absence would be truly, eternally missed. THAT is a definition of welcome that has teeth. And that is how we are supposed to welcome one another.

Can you think of a time when an exceptionally warm welcome caught you off guard?

What would a “radical welcome” look like in your own household?

Apply

Over dinner tonight, brainstorm with your family three ways you can make your household “radically welcoming.” Then invite someone who doesn’t know Jesus over and test your ideas!

PRAY

Lord, thank you for the way you have radically welcomed us into your family. Teach us how to extend that welcome to those who don’t know who you are.

In House: Welcoming the Family

DAY 2 Jesus, we praise you because you are the Christ, the Messiah, the one we've been waiting for and in whom we place all hope. John 1:41

Read John 1:40-42

I NOTICED: _____

Reflect Here we have a tale of two brothers with two different stories. Peter is the larger-than-life personality. By the end of the narrative, he goes big, fails bigger, goes home, and is touchingly restored by Jesus. Andrew is a quieter, less spectacular figure. BUT, his story is no less significant. Because every time we encounter Andrew in the Gospel of John, he is bringing someone to Jesus. And interestingly enough, the first “someone” he brings is his little brother (I don’t know the birth order for sure, but this feels like the bossy sort of thing an older sibling would do).

I find this especially intriguing, because how often are our relatives the *last* people we bring to Jesus? So often those relationships are the hardest to navigate, fraught with egg shells, land mines, and dreaded conversations about “religion.” Why is it that we can go about being our maturing, saints-in-progress selves right up until Thanksgiving dinner, when we revert to our angsty teenage years? Why does it sometimes feel easier to show hospitality to *strangers* than our own *family members*?

I think Andrew can offer us some helpful hints in this very sticky area. **First**, he finds his brother. As in *goes-out-of-his-way-to-track-him-down*. If we're honest with ourselves, how much time do we spend hiding from family instead of finding them? **Second**, Andrew doesn't talk much. "We have found the Messiah"—that's it. No persuading. No meticulously constructed apologetic arguments. He simply says what happened, and leaves it at that. **Third**, Andrew *brings* Peter to Jesus. Not *sends*—he doesn't point Peter in the right direction and wish him well. They go together, Andrew hands Peter off to Jesus, and the world has never been the same.

Who are the people in your family you struggle to engage with?

Think of one family member in particular. How might you start the "Andrew process" of bringing them to Jesus?

Apply

Call up a family member you haven't spoken with in a while, just to check in. Then, pray for that person every morning this week.

PRAY

Lord, thank you for the way you have radically welcomed us into your family. Teach us how to extend that welcome to those who don't know who you are.

The Handoff: Our Job Description

“The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” John 1:14

Read

John 1:42

I NOTICED: _____

Reflect

I suspect that for many of us who may feel reluctant to invite unbelievers into life with Christ, the primary hesitation is something along the lines of “I don’t want to mess it up.”

What if we say the wrong thing? What if our timing is bad? In essence, *what if we botch the job?*

This anxiety is certainly understandable, especially in light of certain phrases. We often hear how we must “be Jesus” to other people, and in a sense, this is true. Paul tells us in Ephesians 4 that we are the “body of Christ”—his living, physical presence on earth. In *Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer mentions how Christians “recognize in each other the Christ who is present in the body” (page 20). But we have to be careful with this language, because we run the risk of misinterpreting what our role in God’s redemptive story actually is.

Our job is not to *be* Jesus. Our job is to *bring people* to Jesus. And this is a big, big difference.

The focus for today is less than half of a verse from Day 2, John 1:42a—“And he brought him to Jesus.” Andrew brings Peter to Jesus, and Jesus takes it from there. These six little words alleviate all the anxiety around welcoming people into the Christian life. Your job is not to be Jesus. Your job is not to save. Your job is not to convict (the Holy Spirit can handle that just fine). Your job is to say, “Let me tell you what Jesus has done for me, and—if you’re interested—I’d love to introduce you.” This involves a lot of relationship. A lot of time. A lot of prayer. *And* all it takes is you showing up and watching God work through your faithfulness.

When you hear the word “evangelism,” what are the first words that come to mind?

What is the story of what Jesus has done in your life? How might you articulate that story to someone who has no experience with faith?

Apply

Think of the “elevator pitch” version of your faith story. Short and sweet, what has Jesus done for you?

PRAY

Lord, thank you for the way you have radically welcomed us into your family. Teach us how to extend that welcome to those who don’t know who you are.

Costly Hospitality: Abundance from Scarcity

“My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior... he has filled the hungry with good things.” Luke 1:46-47, 53

Read

John 6:5-13

I NOTICED: _____

Reflect

This passage is one of the only stories that appears in all four Gospels—Jesus feeding the 5,000. In the narrative Andrew asks a question especially relevant for us as we try to think about what Gospel hospitality—this “radical welcome”—really looks like:

“Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to him, ‘There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many?’”

Once again, we find Andrew bringing someone to Jesus. But this time, he shows up with a scarcity mindset. “Jesus, there is no way this teeny amount of food is going to feed this many people. What are we supposed to do about that?”

If you’ve ever been responsible for cooking Christmas dinner for both sides of the family, you know how he feels. And the reality of genuine, radical hospitality is this: it is costly. In every sense of the word. Hospitality is expensive. It is time-consuming. Odds are, it will tax your sanity. And more often

than not, you will feel like there simply isn't enough time, money, energy, and/or casserole to go around. "Here's what I've got, Lord. But what good is it in the face of so much need?"

Andrew was skeptical. But he showed up anyway. And we know how the story ends—there were more leftovers than you could shake a stick at. The abundance was ridiculous, far surpassing post-Thanksgiving proportions. Yes, hospitality will cost us. And, the Lord will always provide. So bring him every little scrap of time, money, and energy you have. Watch what happens.

What is the most intimidating "cost" of hospitality for you?

Looking at your budget and schedule, what do you have that you can offer Jesus?

Apply

Sit down today and "budget" some radical welcome in your week. Map out even little snippets of time and money you can give to showing hospitality. Ask Jesus to multiply them to meet the needs of those around you.

PRAY

Lord, thank you for the way you have radically welcomed us into your family. Teach us how to extend that welcome to those who don't know who you are.

The Relay

DAY 5

“Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!” John 12:13

Read

John 12:20-22

I NOTICED: _____

Reflect

Let’s just say that my track and field career was minimal at best. I gave it just one season in the seventh grade, and I wasn’t exactly the strongest contribution to the team. At a scrawny 4’11, I never actually ran a relay, but I love to watch them. I find the whole concept fascinating since most of the team will never actually cross the finish line. They certainly contribute to the victory, but 75% of the team may never have the feeling of sprinting that final stretch to victory.

Today’s text is the last time Andrew’s name is explicitly mentioned in the Gospel of John. This time around, he’s still bringing someone to Jesus. But he’s the third man in the relay. Read John 12:20-22 and trace the hand-offs.

That’s the last we hear of those Greeks. We don’t know if they became followers of Jesus. We don’t know if they walked away and never looked back. It’s very possible that Andrew never found out what happened to them, but he relayed those men along to Jesus regardless.

The Italian family I mentioned in Day 1 are “evangelistic atheists.” Still. After three years of living life with them, no profession of faith, no baptism, no expressed interest in following Jesus. So I keep praying and hoping. The reality of life in this world is that most of the time, we will never know the result of our leg in the relay. We will not be the ones to break the tape. We just run as hard as we can, we welcome people into our homes and lives, we pray, and we hope. We trust that God’s grace is working mightily in ways both seen and unseen.

Do you find yourself discouraged as you think about the people in your life who are still far from God?

Who are the people in your own life who helped “relay” you to Jesus?

Apply

In your own journal, write down the names of every person you want to meet Jesus. Pray for them every day by name, and invite one of them over this week.

PRAY

Lord, thank you for the way you have radically welcomed us into your family. Teach us how to extend that welcome to those who don’t know who you are.

New Testament Instructions for Hospitality

Romans 15:7

Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.

Romans 12:13

Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.

Hebrews 13:2

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.

1 Peter 4:9

Show hospitality to one another without grumbling.

1 Thessalonians 5:26

Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss.

LifeGroup Guide

NEW TESTAMENT INTRODUCTION TO

HOSPITALITY: Romans 15:7; 12:13; Hebrews 13:2; 1 Peter 4:9; 1 Thessalonians 5:26

Intro

Read through the selected passages about hospitality. This is a really important theme throughout the Bible. In the Old Testament, it was expected that the Israelites would even welcome strangers and travelers into their home (for example see Job's defense in Job 31:32), and the New Testament is no different.

Each of these verses is a crucial, final instruction from a New Testament letter. Romans 12:13 encourages us to actively seek out and pursue hospitality; Romans 15:7, that we are to contribute to the needs of believers. Hospitality is a "doing" word, and it's one of the last words the writers wants to make sure we retain as we seek to be the people of Jesus. Hospitality is mission-critical.

As you begin this study, start by spending a moment considering the practical, physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of those believers with whom you are in close friendship. Think through the people in your LifeGroup. Where is everybody at? What are their needs? What's one small thing you could do to proactively care for one person this week, even before they ask for help? Pray for them and listen to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Then go do something about what you just heard!



Looking at Romans 15:7, how are we to welcome others?
What does this look like?

How are believers to relate to believers and unbelievers, and at what personal cost, according to Romans 12:13 and Hebrews 13:2?

What attitude are we to have about hospitality?



When have you been treated with incredible hospitality by a stranger? How did it feel? What effect did it have on you?

In 1 Thessalonians 5:26, the believers are told to greet each other with a holy kiss. The kiss was a symbol of Christian fellowship and identification as a believer. What might be today's cultural equivalent? Discuss as a group what type of greeting makes sense in the culture you see in your generation, your life stage, and your community.

How do you relate to strangers you meet out in the community? At church? What does Hebrews 13:2 have to say to you personally?



Spend some time reflecting on what your attitude has been about hospitality. Where is the Holy Spirit convicting or encouraging you?

How can you demonstrate hospitality to both believers and unbelievers as well as friends and strangers, as you go about your week this week? What small change can you make to your actions, behaviors, and body language to show your welcoming attitude?

Welcoming Others in Jesus' Name

DAY 1

“Therefore, welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.” Romans 15:7

Read Romans 15:1-7

I NOTICED: _____

Reflect “Therefore, welcome one another.” When a verse begins with “therefore,” we want to ask what it is *there* for. Romans 15:7 is the conclusion of verses one through six.

Who are the people in Romans 15:1-2 we are to welcome?

In what way does Romans 15:3-4 say Christ modeled this to us?

God is the God of endurance and encouragement (Romans 15:5). Christ died for all. His endurance to the point of sacrifice enables us to welcome and encourage everyone for whom he died. Jesus loved them to the point of dying for them! The goal now is to be in harmony with each other and therefore live in accord with Christ, that with one voice we may glorify God” (Romans 15:6).

When you welcome another you are doing so as a representative of Christ. Since he died for us we are each a part of the body of Christ. We therefore are now Christ's body to the world. We love, because he loved us (I John 4:19). We are his hands and feet for him to work through us (Ephesians 2:10). We are his voice to speak to others about Christ and to welcome them (Romans 10:14-15).

Remind yourself when you encounter anyone who is unknown, difficult, or even hurtful that Christ died for them. In this way you can pray for those who persecute you (Matthew 5:44). Does anyone immediately come to mind? Pause now and pray for them.

Reflect on Christ's death and resurrection for you and what that means regarding your love for him and your ability to love and welcome others.

Apply

Plan to welcome at least one person per day. For example, say hello to someone you don't know, say a kind word to a family member, start up a conversation with a neighbor, or call someone you have not connected with in a while.

PRAY

Lord, I was a stranger and alien before I met you. You welcomed me and sacrificed for me. I pray for the ability to see with your eyes those who are in need and to sacrificially love with your compassion those who you lead me to, that I may love as you first loved me.

Helping Others in Jesus' Name

DAY 2

“Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.”
Romans 12:13

Read

Luke 21:1-4; Romans 12:13

I NOTICED: _____

Reflect

In Biblical times needs were met by the hospitality of others. When there was a famine in Jerusalem, “the disciples determined everyone according to his ability to send relief to the brothers living in Judea” (Acts 11:29). Although many may have been struggling themselves, they gave something according to their ability. Jesus saw the rich putting their gifts in the offering box, and he saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. He praised the widow for giving more than the others because she gave sacrificially (Luke 21:1-4).

Are you regularly giving to a ministry according to your ability in such a way as to contribute to the needs of other Christians, i.e. contributing a tithe (10% of income) or offerings through your local church or directly to a ministry?

When was the last time you gave to someone in the local community when you were made aware of a specific need?

How does this kind of giving demonstrate hospitality?

Hospitality in the Old and New Testament focused on helping aliens or strangers in need and this has been emphasized throughout Scripture. Abraham welcomed strangers (Genesis 18:2-8) and true religion is this: “to visit orphans and widows in their affliction” (James 1:27).

Why is giving as a form of hospitality important to God?

Do you know of a stranger in need?

Apply

Pray about who around you is in need, decide what you can do to welcome or help that person, and put an appointment in your calendar to do it.

PRAY

Lord, I was a stranger and alien before I met you. You welcomed me and sacrificed for me. I pray for the ability to see with your eyes those who are in need and to sacrificially love with your compassion those who you lead me to, that I may love as you first loved me.

Showing Hospitality in Jesus' Name

DAY 3

“Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.”
Hebrews 13:2

Read

Genesis 18:1-21; Hebrews 13:2

I NOTICED: _____

Reflect

When we welcome someone we may not know who we are welcoming, and we could be surprised when we find out who they are. Abraham welcomed strangers when he saw three men in front of him in the heat of the day. How did he extend hospitality to them?

We learn later in the chapter that he was serving the Lord (Genesis 18:13-21). Read Matthew 25:35-40. We serve the Lord when we serve in what ways?

Giving offering to our local church is one way we help to meet these needs. God uses the church to reach out to those with needs through prison ministry and the deacons. Have you

found practical ways that you can help others? This happens often in our daily walk and God opens up opportunities as we see people in need. We can pray for them or offer help to them. We can also go out to them as Abraham did and seek to help those in need.

Reflect on how these verses impact you today. How might you help meet the needs of those around you?

What is God saying to you regarding showing hospitality to strangers?

Apply

Meet one need as described in Matthew 25:35-40 today. Feed someone. Give someone water. Write to someone in prison. Serve Jesus in this way today.

PRAY

Lord, I was a stranger and alien before I met you. You welcomed me and sacrificed for me. I pray for the ability to see with your eyes those who are in need and to sacrificially love with your compassion those who you lead me to, that I may love as you first loved me.

Joyful Hospitality in Jesus' Name

“Show hospitality to one another without grumbling.” 1 Peter 4:9

Read

1 Peter 4:9-11; 2 Corinthians 9:6-15;
Philippians 2:12-15

I NOTICED: _____

Reflect

Hospitality and giving go hand-in-hand. What may be surprising is that the attitude for generous hospitality is to be joy. God expects us to give, but he also examines our heart and motivation in giving. Paul refers to giving and asks believers to give generously in 2 Corinthians 8-9.

What does Paul say about our attitude as it regards giving in 2 Corinthians 9:6-7?

Since we are human and naturally self-centered, because of our sin nature, giving is often difficult. Also, we are raised in a culture of focusing on meeting our own needs. Jesus taught us to love others as we love ourselves (Matthew 22:39).

Such passages can be difficult, but they help us to focus on not doing anything in the flesh or of our own works and effort.

All must be done in the Spirit with God's strength and ability. Circle the words that stick out to you in Philippians 2:12-15, below.

“Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. Do all things without grumbling or questioning that you may be blameless and innocent children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation among whom you shine as lights in the world.”

Reflect on these verses. What do they teach you about giving? About your attitude? About God's power?

Apply

Pray regarding the insights you received from God's word. Ask him how you are to give. Spend time thanking him for his sacrifice for you and for his provision to enable you to live the Christian life in his strength as led by the Holy Spirit. Listen to him regarding what he is saying to you.

PRAY

Lord, I was a stranger and alien before I met you. You welcomed me and sacrificed for me. I pray for the ability to see with your eyes those who are in need and to sacrificially love with your compassion those who you lead me to, that I may love as you first loved me.

Friendly Hospitality in Jesus' Name

“Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss.” 1 Thessalonians 5:26

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:26

I NOTICED: _____

Reflect The admonition to greet one another with a holy kiss was a common exhortation and practice (Acts 20:37; Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 16:20; 2 Corinthians 13:12; 1 Peter 5:14). A holy kiss in some cultures can be a kiss on the cheek, a hug, or a handshake. It is a symbol of fellowship, holiness, love, and respect and involves physical contact with someone else.

Do you communicate love and fellowship in a meaningful way to others in your own culture? How so?

Are you aware of how to do community, love, and friendship in a culture that isn't your own? What does that look like?

Do you greet others at the weekend services before, after, and during the service? How so?

If someone new were to walk into our weekend services this weekend, in what way would they experience the holy, friendly welcome of Jesus? Would you be a part of their welcome experience? How so?

Apply

Plan to find one person to greet every day this week. Let them know that you care about them with a handshake or a hug.

PRAY

Lord, I was a stranger and alien before I met you. You welcomed me and sacrificed for me. I pray for the ability to see with your eyes those who are in need and to sacrificially love with your compassion those who you lead me to, that I may love as you first loved me.

Luke 15:25-32 & 1 Peter 4:8-11

Luke 15:25-32

²⁵ “Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. ²⁷ And he said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.’ ²⁸ But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, ²⁹ but he answered his father, ‘Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. ³⁰ But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!’ ³¹ And he said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. ³² It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.’”

1 Peter 4:8-11

⁸ Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. ⁹ Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. ¹⁰ As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace: ¹¹ whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

LifeGroup Guide

Luke 15:25-32

Intro

You may have heard or read this story many times before. Spend a moment before you begin and ask for fresh eyes and insight into this passage. What does God want to speak to you today?

We've all had ugly moments of jealousy and anger when we feel forgotten, unappreciated, and unloved compared to another. Perhaps this reads much like your family story or the way you have been treated at work. As you read this story today, ask God to heal you in deep ways only he can. Ask God to give you a soft heart and compassion towards even the most unlovable.

Dwell on the father's heart for the lost as demonstrated in this story and spend a moment thanking God for your own salvation and the many blessings he has given to you. Thank him for the promise that he will replace your heart of stone with a heart of flesh (Ezekiel 36:26), and ask him to continue his work of transformation in your life.

Pray: "Only by your grace and mercy, Father, change our cold hearted attitude toward others and open us up to be less selfish and more excited about welcoming others!"



What differences are there between the welcome that the father and the older son give the younger brother?

What does the father in the prodigal son story remind us about the character of God?



Who do you identify with most in this story and why?

What is your reaction to the person with a personal history like the younger son? Have you ever found yourself judging someone you see in church because of their appearance and/or story rather than welcoming them with open arms?

Notice the extravagance and costliness of the welcome party given by the father. When have you ever shown or been shown this type of extravagance? What was the motivation for it?

Have you ever felt angry or passed over when others have received attention and they seem less deserving than you? How did you eventually change your attitude?



Did today's passage make you think about someone you feel jealous of or hurt by? Spend time in prayer for that person and commit the situation into God's hands. Ask for the Holy Spirit to search and shape your heart to be more like his.

How can you be more extravagant and joyful about welcoming those who are different from you?

A Heart That Celebrates

DAY 1

“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.” Ephesians 2:13

Read

Luke 15:1-10; 25-32

I NOTICED: _____

Reflect

To whom is Jesus speaking in Luke 15:25-32? If you are unfamiliar with the Parable of the Prodigal Son, read also Luke 15:11-24. Who do the older and younger sons represent in the passage? With which son do you identify most?

Why do you think Jesus told the first two parables before telling this story of the lost son(s)? What is the significance of the lost sheep and the lost coin?

Using the text printed for you at the beginning of this week’s devotional, circle the word *celebrate*, and underline all the

things the father did to celebrate his son's return. List those things here:

How did the older son react to this celebration? We will explore this topic more tomorrow, but in a word, what was his attitude toward his brother?

Finally, what reasons did the father give for celebrating his younger son's return? Using the text again, double underline all the reasons. What does the father mean when he says, "your brother was dead, and is alive"?

Apply

What does Luke 15:7 say about how God feels when a sinner repents? Read Romans 12:15. How should we feel when someone comes to faith in Christ? How can we celebrate with them?

Think of someone you know who has recently committed to follow Christ, or who has returned to faith after being away from the church. Thank God for them, and rejoice in the salvation he brings to people through his only son, Jesus Christ.

PRAY

LORD, help me to remember that I am yours only by your grace, and that you welcomed me when I was still far off from you. Give me a heart to extend that kind of grace and hospitality to others.

A Heart for Others

DAY 2

**“Salvation belongs to the LORD;
your blessing be upon your people!”**

Psalm 3:8

Read

Luke 15:25-32; Acts 10:34-42; 11:17-18

I NOTICED: _____

Reflect

Yesterday, you answered the question, “How did the older son react to the celebration?”

What word did you use to describe his attitude? What were his particular complaints?

Using the text, put a blue box around all the “I” statements the brother makes. Put a red box around all the “You” statements that show what he thinks the father did. What does the son say that suggests why a celebration in his honor might not have been more appropriate?

Clearly the older son held much resentment concerning the actions of the younger. What term did he use to refer to him?

How did the father respond?

The father reminds his son that he is a brother to the one who was lost and explains why it was right to celebrate his return and repentance. By the way, where was this older son when his brother returned? What was he doing?

This son likens his existence to that of a servant (see Luke 15:29), yet he was not treated as such by his father. How do we know that he was treated as a son and heir? The father did not call the older to wait on and serve the younger, but called him to celebrate with him, just as we are called to celebrate with others.

What is the ministry we are all called to (those of us who are in Christ) according to 2 Corinthians 5:17-20? How does this correspond to the parable of the prodigal son and the attitude of the older brother?

Apply

As a son or daughter of God, God is always with you and all that is his is yours. How does that translate to your local church? What are you doing to welcome the lost and the prodigal in our midst?

PRAY

LORD, help me to remember that I am yours only by your grace, and that you welcomed me when I was still far off from you. Give me a heart to extend that kind of grace and hospitality to others.

A Heart of Flesh

DAY 3

“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.”

Psalm 51:17

Read

Luke 15:17-34

I NOTICED: _____

Reflect

The younger son’s father had compassion on him because he had been presumed dead but was found to be alive. What is another possible perspective of this truth, i.e. what was a spiritual meaning that Jesus might have meant to convey?

By all accounts, the older brother had lived an exemplary life, fulfilling the duty of the older son and heir to his father’s household. Yet in a moment of anger, fueled by bitterness and jealousy, we see his true heart. Read Galatians 5:19-26. What do we learn about his heart? What could he do that might change his heart?

Interestingly, the father killed the fattened calf for the son who repented. The older son lamented that he had not even been granted a young goat. Both of these animals are significant in the sacrificial system of the Old Testament. A bull or calf was sacrificed for personal sin, and the goat was sacrificed for the sins of the nation of Israel. This reference would not have been lost on the Pharisees who were listening to Jesus speak.

Jesus was introducing a profound truth that would become clear after his death. Read Hebrews 10:1-7. We know from the New Testament that Jesus was sacrificed for our sins, once for all. It is by his blood that we are now cleansed from unrighteousness. It is through him that our relationship with God, and our brothers and sisters, is restored.

Read 1 John 2:9-11. How does this shed light on the brothers' relationship? On how the father responded to his older son? What should the brother do to restore his relationships?

Apply

What sorts of issues arise that cause hurt and heartache when you come to church? How do those areas of hurt impact the way you welcome others? Imagine the Father pulling you aside for a conversation before a weekend service when you see those who cause you hurt and heartache welcomed in. What do you say to him? What does he say to you?

PRAY

LORD, help me to remember that I am yours only by your grace, and that you welcomed me when I was still far off from you. Give me a heart to extend that kind of grace and hospitality to others.

The Heart of Hospitality

DAY 4

“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.” Psalm 19:14

Read 1 Peter 4:8-11

I NOTICED: _____

Reflect Peter would have been present as Jesus spoke the parables of Luke 15. In 1 Peter 4:8-9, Peter adds a component to hospitality that we might call, “The Heart of Hospitality”—love for one another, our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Peter reminds us that love covers a multitude of sins, and we are to show hospitality without grumbling. The Greek word for grumbling, gugguzo, actually implies that not grumbling (also grudging, or muttering) means “to do something cheerfully.”

So it may seem unnatural, but we have biblical examples of people extending hospitality on the outside while grumbling underneath. One of the classic examples of a hospitable grumbler was Martha of Bethany. Read Luke 10:38-42. What was Martha’s complaint?

Up until that point, where had Mary been?

The story of these two women brings out an important distinction between whole-hearted hospitality and merely entertaining. Clearly Martha had received Jesus as a guest and her priority was to do the cooking and cleaning and serving. Mary, on the other hand, spent time with Jesus showing him attentiveness and kindness that went beyond a meal and place to sit. Which of these women do you identify with most? Why?

1 Peter 4:8-9 moves from hospitality without grumbling to serving one another with our gifts in verses 10-11. What comes to mind as to how you might show hospitality using your gifts at your local church?

Apply

Entertaining allows us to welcome others into a space; hospitality allows us to welcome them into our lives. What is one way you can show more hospitality in your life? What are some challenges to making that happen? Pray that God would remove those barriers this week.

PRAY

LORD, help me to remember that I am yours only by your grace, and that you welcomed me when I was still far off from you. Give me a heart to extend that kind of grace and hospitality to others.

The Heart of a Servant

DAY 5

“Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.” John 15:13

Read

1 Peter 4:8-11

I NOTICED: _____

Reflect

Yesterday we learned that we use our spiritual gifts in the context of hospitality. Whatever our gifts, we are to use them in a way that extends grace to others and glorifies God.

If we carry this into the theme of entertaining vs. hospitality, we might say that it is the difference between using our talents to impress, to gain validation, to fulfill a need within ourselves to do something for others versus using our gifts to serve others, to show the kindness and welcome of Jesus to our guests, and to meet their needs through relationship and intentionality.

What are your talents? Where has God given you the ability to serve? Are you using those talents and abilities to serve in your church or community?

Remembering Martha and her less than gracious attitude while serving, look up the following verses and list ways to serve one another cheerfully and without grumbling.

John 15:12 _____

Romans 12:16 _____

Romans 14:13 _____

Ephesians 4:1-3, 32 _____

Hebrews 10:24-25 _____

Circle which verse resonated the most with you. What would it look like if we treated everyone who came through the doors of our church according to these principles? Or if you carried those principles wherever you go?

Apply

Spend some time in reflection on the week's study. Using the principles you learned, ask God to show you how he wants you to extend true hospitality to those around you. Write a brief statement of your commitment to start or continue being hospitable to those around you.

PRAY

LORD, help me to remember that I am yours only by your grace, and that you welcomed me when I was still far off from you. Give me a heart to extend that kind of grace and hospitality to others.

Luke 14:7-11

The Parable of the Wedding Feast

⁷ Now he told a parable to those who were invited, when he noticed how they chose the places of honor, saying to them, ⁸“When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in a place of honor, lest someone more distinguished than you be invited by him, ⁹ and he who invited you both will come and say to you, ‘Give your place to this person,’ and then you will begin with shame to take the lowest place. ¹⁰ But when you are invited, go and sit in the lowest place, so that when your host comes he may say to you, ‘Friend, move up higher.’ Then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at table with you. ¹¹ For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

LifeGroup Guide

Luke 14:7-11

Intro

We are going to get really practical and really honest today. How possessive of “your” stuff, your place, your pew are you? How protective of your reputation and comfort? How controlling are you with habits and routines? Ouch. I’m already squirming. How about most of those?! Today’s parable has some hard and challenging words for us. It teaches about the value of humility. It shows us the way things are and will be in God’s kingdom.

Jesus intentionally aimed this story at the religious insiders. They are the ones in the parable who are invited. It’s easy to focus on what this story teaches us for the future and be grateful that “those” people will be humbled and taken down a peg or two. But what if “those” people are actually us? (Deep exhale.) How does this story apply to you in the here and now? Today’s questions will guide you through evaluating where your heart is at—and how you can take simple steps to show hospitality to others simply by giving up your seat.



What does true humility look like? Look at James 4:6 and 1 Peter 5:5-6.

How is this parable of the wedding feast a picture of the kingdom of God?

How does this parable mirror the sacrifice and exaltation of Jesus to his rightful place?



What is your “seat” that you struggle to give up to others? Is it literally your pew or something else?

Where do you sit in church? Have you ever arrived and someone is sitting in your usual spot? How did it feel and how did you respond?

What motivation did the person in the story have for taking the best seat? Why do you think it is so hard to give up ourselves for another?



How does this teaching about humility apply to the literal seats you choose as you go about life? At home, at church, at a party, on public transport? Where can you make a change in your attitude about your seat as you go about your week?

How can you show hospitality this week by giving up your favorite chair, your favorite routine, your place of honor?

Religion and the Heart

**“Search me, O God, and know my heart!
Try me and know my thoughts!
And see if there be any grievous way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.”**

Psalm 139:23-24

Read

Luke 14:1-11; Hosea 6:6

I NOTICED: _____

Reflect

What do you learn about the Pharisees in Luke 14:1-6?

It's really easy to pile on the Pharisees, especially because it seems like that's what Jesus does. They're the stuck-up types, the "lovers of money," the apparent antagonist of the Gospel narratives. But historically speaking, the Pharisees were the best thing Israel had going at the time. Pharisees were the most Biblically conservative (yes, there were liberal scholars back then, too), they were on the forefront of philanthropy and charity wherever they lived, and they, above anyone else in their society, were among the most concerned to honor God and be faithful to him. In other words, they sound an awful lot like your average church-goer in America. Ouch. But before

you get all defensive, recall that at the beginning of our overarching passage this week in Luke 14, we find that Jesus is in the midst of them, having dinner together. Whatever the Pharisee's foibles, Jesus still takes the time to hang out and speak to them.

So what might he have to say to them (maybe us)? Well, I think the gist of it would be to be careful not to let the right matters get in the way of the heart matters. It's not just Pharisees; that's human nature. We get caught up in figuring out what's right and what's wrong, at the expense of watching our hearts. We are looking closely at how to *do* things and forgetting who God calls us to *be*.

In Hosea 6:6, what would be the "right" matters? What are the "heart" matters?

It took Jesus and his radical outside perspective wading into their midst to jolt our religious forbearers. Perhaps today you need to invite Jesus into your midst to jolt your assumptions about what right-living looks like.

Apply

Pay attention to your heart today. See if you ever find yourself saying, internally or otherwise, "That's not right!" Or perhaps, "That's the right way!" Then ask Jesus to search your heart for humility and love. If you find those lacking, ask him to provide!

PRAY

Holy Spirit, search my heart. Jesus, give me your humility. Father, let me be like you.

Who Gets the Call?

DAY 2

“For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” Acts 2:38

Read

Luke 14:12-14

I NOTICED: _____

Reflect

Pardon a bit of language nerdiness, but when you read Luke 14 there is one word that appears multiple times in the Greek: καλέω. Before you say, “That’s Greek to me,” I’ll tell you what it means. Roughly it means “to call,” or “the called one,” but in our passage it’s most often interpreted as “invited.” All that to say, invitation is a main theme of Luke 14. Luke 14:7-11 is about what to do when you’re invited. Verses 12-14 are about who you are to invite. Who does Jesus want to see invited?

In short, Jesus seems to be pretty sensitive to the question of who gets the invite. He’s very aware of who’s in the room with him, and by extension, who isn’t. Why? Well, simply put, Jesus was motivated by love. He didn’t need the accolades or the prestige to feel like he was on the inside, all those things

that smack of self-love. Instead, he was hyper-aware of where love was lacking, of where he could give love instead of receive it. Invitation is one of the simplest ways we extend love. When we extend invitation, we say, “I care about you. I want to be with you.”

Take a few moments to reflect on who you typically invite. This is not to evoke guilt but for the purposes of self-awareness. Who has been on your invitation list in the last month?

Recall what it is like to feel included. Use the space below to jot down names or recall positive aspects of what it's like to be included.

Apply

Today consider widening your circle by one person, particularly one person you wouldn't typically invite. Invite them to dinner or coffee.

PRAY

Holy Spirit, search my heart. Jesus, give me your humility. Father, let me be like you.

Where Do You Hang Out?

DAY 3

**“Know that the Lord, he is God!
It is he who made us, and we are his;
we are his people, and the sheep of his
pasture.” Psalm 100:3**

Read

Luke 12:13-21

I NOTICED: _____

Reflect

In Jesus’ day, the typical “dinner party” was actually quite intimate. The Romans called the dinner described in our week’s passage, Luke 14, a “convivium,” which you may recognize is related to our word “convivial.” In a convivium, there would typically be 9-12 people arranged around a low, square table, three persons to each side. Each person would lounge around the table with their feet facing away, leaning on their left arm so that their right hand was free. Because of this arrangement, people kind of stacked on top of each other, with the head of one person ending up near the chest of the next. This is why John 13 refers to the disciple John “leaning back against” Jesus. Suffice it to say, it was close quarters and not at all what one would expect of a dinner nowadays.

Realizing how intimate these parties would be, it’s not hard to see why invites were stingy. Would you want to lay your head on the chest of someone who smelled? Or who wasn’t really friends with you, for that matter?

And yet, Jesus challenges our assumptions about what we do with what is ours. The parable in Luke 12:13-21 reminds us that all that we have—our time, our energy, our resources—all of it comes from God and will one day go back to him. If that's true, then what would stinginess reflect? What about generosity?

Yesterday we reflected on where we are keeping our social circles tight. What are you keeping a tight grip on? Money? Places of eating? Places of sitting? Give the Holy Spirit time to show you what you're holding onto.

Apply

Take a moment to jot down where you feel most possessive in life. Perhaps it's your things, maybe it's relationships, maybe it's other intangibles, like time. Allow God to speak to you in prayer about how you feel about those things.

PRAY

Holy Spirit, search my heart. Jesus, give me your humility. Father, let me be like you.

Coming in Last Place

DAY 4

“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” Matthew 11:28-30

Read

Matthew 18:1-4

I NOTICED: _____

Reflect

The aphorism that ends our main passage in Luke 14:11 is one that is not unique to that passage. “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted,” shows up in multiple places, in different Gospel accounts, and in different stories. Given that repetition, it’s clear it was an important principle in Jesus’ mind. Like everything Jesus said, it’s important not to mistake it as merely practical advice; it has an eternal weight to its meaning.

The search for understanding this principle leads us to today’s passage. In what way is a child humble?

Note the stakes Jesus gives to childlike humility: entrance to the Kingdom of heaven. In other words, humility has eternal impact. Why?

Well, let's think about it. Who is our chief example as someone who became like a child? Who is the one human being who best exemplified humbling themselves? (I hope you said, in your best Sunday School voice, "Jesus!") But before you jump ahead and say, "I need to be humble like Jesus to get into heaven," let me just pull on the reins a bit. You can never attain eternal-life, childlike, Jesus-like levels of humility on your own. That would be reason to exalt yourself, after all. Instead, your humility must lead you to a place to be exalted by God.

So take a moment to consider the place this kind of eternally important, God-given humility has in your life. Where do you see it expressed? Where do you desire to see it expressed?

Apply

The application today builds on your reflection; take note of where you desire more humility. Whatever that relationship, circumstance, or scheduled moment is, write it down and consider praying something like the prayer below when you are in that place.

PRAY

Holy Spirit, search my heart. Jesus, give me your humility. Father, let me be like you.

Small Things with Great Weight

DAY 5

**“O Lord, you have searched me and known me!
You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from afar.
You search out my path and my lying down
and are acquainted with all my ways.” Psalm 139:1-2**

Read Luke 16:10

I NOTICED: _____

Reflect Years ago, I learned the term “Jesus juke.” It refers to when someone, probably someone pretentiously super-spiritual, attempts to turn any conversation into a spiritual one without an appropriate lead-in. For example, imagine I am discussing a movie with a friend, thusly: “I saw a movie the other day, it was really cool.” If my friend were to reply, in all seriousness, “You know what’s cool? Reading the Bible,” they would have performed a Jesus juke.

If you think about it, Jesus appears to make Jesus jukes all the time. He seems to make mundane situations into spiritual ones on the turn of a dime, as in our week’s passage in Luke 14. The difference being that Jesus bears no pretention. More importantly, Jesus had incredible insight into what seemingly little things in life bore great spiritual weight. This dinner, after all, was not merely a dinner, but a place of pretense, pride, and missed opportunity.

Consider Luke 16:10. What was Jesus talking about there as very little and much?

What are the small things in your life that bear this kind of spiritual weight?

Do you dismiss their importance too quickly, without recognizing how they may bear on the state of your soul? This is why it's worth spending time reflecting on something as mundane as "your" seat in church. I wonder if Jesus would walk into a worship service, see our attitudes of possession, pride, inhospitality, or perhaps other vices, and pull a proper Jesus juke on us.

Apply

What is one small thing in your life that hints at deeper issues? Perhaps it is how you regard seating in worship. Perhaps it's something else. Possessiveness, "I-deserve-it" attitudes, and self-righteousness can be leading indicators that something "small" can actually be a big deal. Write a prayer, surrendering that thing to Jesus.

Jesus, I give you _____ . Let it take its proper weight in my life: no more, no less, than you would have it matter.

PRAY

Holy Spirit, search my heart. Jesus, give me your humility. Father, let me be like you.

Luke 24:28-35

²⁸ So [two disciples and Jesus] drew near to the village to which they were going. [Jesus] acted as if he were going farther, ²⁹ but they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent.” So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰ When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. ³¹ And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight. ³² They said to each other, “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?” ³³ And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem. And they found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, ³⁴ saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!” ³⁵ Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread.

LifeGroup Guide

Luke 24:28-35

Intro

Two people go for a walk and end up in a conversation with Jesus. They don't recognize him but they've made a connection. They offer him a meal and a place to stay for the night. The first part of this story sounds much like my daily experience. I'm going about life, and I end up in a conversation with a stranger. I love it when that happens! But I don't think I've ever offered any of them a place to stay for the night after a first meeting. Today's story shows us just how ingrained it was for the disciples to offer hospitality. It was so a part of their culture and their way of living out their faith that even before they knew who Jesus was, they had welcomed him into their homes, provided him a meal, and asked him to stay the night!

Just the very facts of this story should be a challenge to us. Is hospitality so much a way of life for you that you could accidentally end up hosting someone so significant?! I'm really struck by how transformational this experience is for the disciples. They didn't do anything fancy or elaborate with Jesus in this account. Simply walked together and ate together. And the consequences of their hospitality are huge. They are so excited about their shared time with Jesus that they tell everyone, and faith is passed on. They make disciples who make disciples as a result of a moment of hospitality.



What does hospitality look like in this account?

Why did the disciples offer hospitality to Jesus?

How were the disciples transformed by offering simple hospitality to Jesus?



When have you offered hospitality to a person and looked back and realized that a moment of sharing a meal, a walk together, or shared time in your home marked the beginning of something far more significant?

How have you been transformed by the simple offer of time spent together? What friendships in your life or your kids' lives started this way?

When has your LifeGroup spent time together just being present, without a formal structure or agenda? How did you contribute to that time? How did it transform your friendships?



Who could you invite to walk, share a meal, or come into your home this week?

When you meet someone new at church this month, consider inviting them over for a meal after church. It doesn't have to be fancy. Time spent together and a welcoming attitude is the goal, not fancy food or the perfect home. May you know Jesus more for the time you spend together.

Opportunity or Interruption?

DAY 1

“Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.”

Hebrews 13:2

Read

Luke 24:13-29

I NOTICED: _____

Reflect

They had every excuse to walk away and not extend an invitation to the stranger who’d interrupted their journey. This was no ordinary day for the two travelers walking the nearly seven-mile path between Jerusalem and Emmaus. They’ve just experienced a spiritual earthquake as their leader was condemned and crucified, and their heavy hearts had a lot to discuss.

How did the two travelers respond to this stranger (Jesus) interrupting their journey?

How do you react when your day, routine, or schedule is interrupted?

Their journey and the daylight are ending as the trio draw near to Emmaus. Of all that Jesus could’ve done in this moment he chooses to offer something to these travelers: an opportunity

at an invitation. First, Cleopas and his traveling companion accepted the stranger into their conversation, but will they invite him into their evening plans as well? Will they view this interruption as a passing inconvenience or as an opportunity to practice hospitality?

When have you been new or unknown and someone invited you in?

Perhaps during their time as followers of Jesus, they'd heard his instructions on kingdom hospitality like those recorded in Matthew 25:43, "I was a stranger and you did not welcome me." Maybe they witnessed Jesus' unrelenting hospitality during his ministry years? We don't know their motives, but we do know they not only extended an invitation to this stranger, they "urged him strongly" to stay with them. Our green light to step into hospitality lay in the final words of Luke 24:29, "So he went in." Jesus, the newly risen Savior, allowed for an invitation from His creation before going in to reveal his identity.

Does studying the ways Jesus lived out hospitality, both as a guest and host, challenge the way you view interruptions or inconveniences?

Apply

Write down three activities or routines you're currently doing where you could invite someone to join you. Maybe an evening walk, sporting event, or Alpha? Pray to see interruptions as opportunities to invite.

PRAY

Heavenly Father, thank you for inviting me into your eternal family. Teach me how to have an open heart of hospitality and love like you love.

Cast Your Net

DAY 2 “When he was at the table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight.” Luke 24:30-31

Read

Romans 12:13; John 21:1-14; Luke 5:1-11

I NOTICED: _____

Reflect

Jesus often reveals his presence and power to people during their every day, ordinary lives. As readers, we're honored with this bird's eye view of Jesus' ways of reaching the hearts of people. He teaches faith and trust through nets bursting with fish, an unexpected dinner party, and a seaside breakfast.

How do you experience God in your ordinary, everyday moments?

Romans 12:13 tells us to “seek to show hospitality” or in the NIV translation, “practice hospitality.” Describe a time when you've been shown Christlike hospitality.

Christlike hospitality unlocks doors to relationship, and relationship unlocks doors to discipleship. Jesus demonstrates over and over again the importance of seeking opportunities to show this kind of hospitality. What hospitality moments do you see in your readings today?

With Jesus present, even the most ordinary bread becomes holy communion. When we believe in the presence of Jesus in our everyday lives we can practice hospitality in confidence knowing he uses ordinary moments to transform lives as only he can.

Like the first disciples, we can cast our nets trusting Jesus will provide people who need exactly what he is offering through us—an up close, imperfect, personal testimony of what a life transformed by the perfect love of Christ looks like. Practicing hospitality might mean we encounter awkward conversations and failed attempts at relationship, but it doesn't mean we don't keep casting. Playing a role in growing God's kingdom means we set aside our comfort zones for the sake of stepping into the boat so we're ready to cast our nets wherever he sends us.

Apply

Where might God be asking you to cast your net this week? Ask him to open your eyes to whom might need to know the love of Jesus through your ordinary acts of hospitality.

PRAY

Heavenly Father, thank you for inviting me into your eternal family. Teach me how to have an open heart of hospitality and love like you love.

An Open and Willing Heart

DAY 3

“They said to each other, ‘Did not our hearts burn within us while He talked to us on the road, while He opened to us the Scriptures?’” Luke 24:32

Read

1 John 4:16; Hebrews 10:19-22

I NOTICED: _____

Reflect

It's important for God's people to understand why we're to practice hospitality. After all, you don't have to be a Christian to be hospitable.

Hospitality can simply be an expression of culture, upbringing, and tradition. There's nothing inherently holy or sanctifying about a shared pot of coffee, bike ride, or church pew, so what is the difference-maker in the hospitality of a follower of Jesus?

What is the difference between cultural hospitality and biblical hospitality?

For the two travelers on their way to Emmaus the presence of Jesus and his desire to be with his followers was their difference-maker. Apart from Jesus, they were just on a long, chatty walk. Jesus enters their conversation and this walk has their hearts burning with fiery faith. Recognizing the presence of God in every walk of our lives is our difference-maker too.

Our personal relationship with Jesus moves us to invite others into experiencing the same joy and freedom. As recipients of the greatest display of hospitality, Jesus throwing open the door to God's kingdom and welcoming us inside, we get to introduce others to the greatest host in all eternity and extend his free gift of salvation.

According to Hebrews 10:19-22, why can we enter God's presence with confidence?

We can have a holy confidence that God's love is living in us (1 John 4:16). It is God's presence that is able to transform lives through humble acts of hospitality. Jesus could've just revealed himself to his followers any way he wanted, but for some reason he chose an invitation to dinner as his designated moment. Hospitality, as we see in Luke 24, isn't just a position of your home and schedule; it's an open and willing position of your heart.

When have you been on the receiving end of Christlike hospitality? Who has shown you what it looks like to express the love of God toward others through hospitality?

Apply

Commit 1 John 4:16 to memory today. Repeat it as you go throughout the week. Do you believe you're seen and known by a God who is love? How can you communicate that love with others in practical ways?

PRAY

Heavenly Father, thank you for inviting me into your eternal family. Teach me how to have an open heart of hospitality and love like you love.

Better Together

DAY 4

“And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem. And they found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together saying, ‘The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!’” Luke 24:33-34

Read

Ephesians 4:15-16; Colossians 3:14-16

I NOTICED: _____

Reflect

When you get great news, what do you typically do right away?

Give us good news and we bubble over from excitement and race to tell others who can relate to our elation. Share a time this week when you received good news.

For these two travelers, encountering the resurrected Jesus changed everything. As discouraged as they were walking to Emmaus discussing Jesus’ tragic death, we can imagine their walk back to Jerusalem being overjoyed considering they had just sat down to dinner with someone they thought was three days dead.

Their eager desire to return to their like-minded community can be our reminder of the importance of being in a united, Christ-centered body of believers. What does this have to do with our topic of hospitality? When a faith community and discipling

relationships are healthy and growing, then it's a joy to practice biblical hospitality. Isn't it easier to invite someone into a place where we feel love and belonging? Even a complete stranger can feel welcome in a place where people are dressed in love, unified in thanksgiving for all God is doing in their lives (Colossians 3:14-16). Now that's inviting!

What are two ways you can be the church you want to invite others into?

Cleopas and his companion didn't assume it was someone else's job to report the good news of Jesus' resurrection. They didn't wait to hear the news to see if Jesus went to Jerusalem, too. They acted on their newly reignited faith and promptly returned to the place where their people gathered. What can you do to ensure there's welcoming room for everyone in the body of Christ?

Apply

Write down three simple things you can do this week to make your faith community more welcoming (introduce yourself to a stranger at church, sit somewhere new in worship service, talk with people outside of your usual circle after church, invite someone to Alpha, etc.).

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

PRAY

Heavenly Father, thank you for inviting me into your eternal family. Teach me how to have an open heart of hospitality and love like you love.

Your Hospitality Story

“Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread.”

Luke 24:35

DAY 5

Read

Luke 24:36-40; 2 Corinthians 2:14

I NOTICED: _____

Reflect

Who doesn't love a great story? Many of our most beloved stories revolve around being invited into relationship in some way, shape, or form: marriage proposals, job offer, new baby, finding friendships in a new city, and ultimately a relationship with our Creator through Jesus. What story do you find yourself telling over and over? Does it include some kind of new or renewed relationship?

After Jesus appeared to the two travelers heading to Emmaus, they had a new story to share. Imbedded in the details of their story was a moment when they invited a stranger to stay with them for the night, a story of new friendship. Of course, the highlight was the moment this stranger's hands tore open the bread and they realized it was Jesus at their dinner table. What an amazing hospitality story they had to share with the other disciples back in Jerusalem! Their blind eyes saw everything with crystal clear clarity and they couldn't wait to share the news that their Savior and King has conquered death and lives again.

In Christ we have a hospitality story, a story of new friendship, to share as well. Once strangers to God, he invites us to know him through his Son. Jesus' death on the cross and resurrection is our story's magnificent highlight. When our sin-blind eyes finally recognize Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we're handed a key to our Father's eternal house and welcomed home.

Describe a time when you recognized Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior. Use a separate piece of paper if necessary.

Jesus makes it possible for us all to be invited to God's eternal table. Through the breaking of bread in communion we remember the breaking of his body for our sins. What an honor that God allows us to play a part in other people's stories! Through a humble invitation or an awkward first introduction we get to be the fragrance of the knowledge of Christ, pointing others to a relationship with God who invites them to come close and discover for themselves that he's more real and accessible than we dare believe (Luke 24:39).

Apply

God is working through you to make Jesus known. Ask God to show you what a heart of hospitality looks like for the people you interact with today. Look for him to answer that prayer and thank him for a new day to be his "fragrance"!

PRAY

Heavenly Father, thank you for inviting me into your eternal family. Teach me how to have an open heart of hospitality and love like you love.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

You don't need to go out and buy these, but we wanted you to know what those of us who wrote the study used for our own study references. Some of these are quoted in the study. The others would be great next-step resources for you or your LifeGroup.

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