



CHAPTER 2

Kingdom Hospitality

How the King's People Welcome Others

Involvement with people, especially the marginalized, begins with a profound grasp of God's grace.

TIM CHESTER, *A MEAL WITH JESUS*

There is nothing more ordinary than a meal. In preparation for a message on hospitality (Luke 14:12–24), I asked my kids at the dinner table, “What are your all-time favorite meals?” The answers included meals at birthday parties (especially those with piñatas!), Thanksgiving dinners, and Christmas dinners. My wife included a Passover meal that we had with some friends. My top pick was our wedding dinner. I’ll never forget the music, the friends, the amazing food, and of course, eating with my new beautiful bride, my dear companion, Kimberly.

What are your all-time favorite meals?

My guess is that the majority of people wouldn’t select meals based solely on taste; they would pick meals that involved special company. Friends, family, fun, and good food are ingredients for unforgettable meals. You want these nights to last forever.

Few people would select the burrito they grabbed one night at a Taco Bell drive-thru as their all-time favorite meal, or eating Ramen

Noodles alone as a broke college student, or grabbing a chicken wrap as they scurry to their gate at the Atlanta airport. We long for more. So much more.

How does something as ordinary as a meal become extraordinarily meaningful? Why is it that when a loved one dies in your family, one of the most precious memories you have of them is around the dinner table? Their absence is felt particularly strong when you sit down *without* them. What is this saying to us?

HOSPITALITY AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD

All of these experiences are pointing us toward the kingdom of God. The apostle John tells us of a marriage supper in Revelation 19, in which we enjoy a meal with our King. Christ is the Groom and we are His bride. It's a picture of total satisfaction. Isaiah prophesied about this messianic feast, saying:

On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined. . . . He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces.⁸²

Think about this vision. The Lord Himself will prepare a meal with the finest of meats and the finest of wines for His people. He will serve the best, and we won't have an ounce of disappointment.

The reason we long for companionship and good food with great friends and family is that we're made for this experience. This life is pointing us to the next life. Unfortunately, too many of us have underdeveloped notions about heaven. Some think it's an endless sing-along. Others have a cartoon concept of heaven, like sitting on a cloud in a diaper playing a harp. Still more have an Eastern idea of heaven. When they think of heaven, they think of an ethereal realm of disembodied spirits.

Let's think again. Think new heaven and new earth, with our real, glorified bodies, with Jesus, and all His people, feasting and rejoicing in the grace of God.

Don't get me wrong, we're not *only* going to feast in heaven, but one of the pictures that we should see is this idea of a messianic banquet. Jesus told a parable saying that all are invited to His banquet, yet sadly many decline the invitation because other things are more important.⁸³ How kind of the King to invite us to His party!

WHAT IS HOSPITALITY?

We need to see hospitality through the lens of Scripture in order to understand it rightly and find motivation to do it faithfully. Hospitality doesn't mean *entertaining* people. "Entertaining" is often about impressing others; hospitality is about serving others. Entertaining is often about the host; hospitality is about the guests. Entertaining is often shallow and superficial; hospitality is about depth and authenticity.

Not only should we distinguish hospitality from entertaining, but we should also distinguish it from *fellowship*. Generally speaking, fellowship happens among believers in biblical community (which we need). But *hospitality* literally means, "love for strangers." Hospitality is what we extend to outsiders, strangers, and those in physical and spiritual need.

To qualify, I don't think you need to worry if your hospitality has a mixture of believers and unbelievers; of needy and not-so-needy people. For it seems that Jesus regularly had a mixture of people around Him. My point is that we must have an open heart/home toward people that extends beyond what's comfortable, culturally normal, and exclusive. Jesus' hospitality was countercultural and inclusive in that He hung out with riffraff and the needy, and He certainly didn't try to show off His fine china. For Jesus, the table was a place for friendship, welcome, gospel communication, and mission. We

need to follow His example and use the table and our homes to put the gospel on display.

Hospitality is a culturally appropriate way to do faithful evangelism, and a practical way to do ordinary mercy and justice. It's also biblical imperative. It isn't limited to a single verse, but is woven throughout the story line of Scripture. As we seek to elevate our view of hospitality, consider three exhortations: (1) Opening Our Bibles; (2) Opening Our Hearts; and (3) Opening Our Doors.

Opening Our Bibles

Hospitality Revealed in the Biblical Story Line: One could tell the story of Scripture through the theme of hospitality. In the garden, God provided a home and provision for Adam and Eve, but they rebelled against Him. Despite their sin, God graciously *clothed them* by making garments of animal skins.⁸⁴ Keller calls this the first act of mercy ministry.⁸⁵ While it certainly has a spiritual dynamic of covering our sin, it shows more than that since this was a physical provision also. Derek Kidner comments on it, saying, "Social action could not have had an earlier or more exalted inauguration."⁸⁶

God the host not only provided food and clothing for our first parents, but later in the book of Exodus He provided miraculous food and water for His people as they wandered in the wilderness. During this forty-year journey, their clothes and sandals never wore out either!⁸⁷ Additionally, the Exodus was to be remembered through the Passover meal. The Israelites would taste the grace of God, and reflect upon His salvation in this table experience.

The story goes on. God promises His people that He will take them to "a land flowing with milk and honey."⁸⁸ God hosts His people and gives them an enjoyable home.

Fast-forward to the New Testament. Jesus appears, and is constantly eating with people, and even gets labeled as "a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!"⁸⁹ He even eats in the homes of the hated tax collectors, like Levi and Zacchaeus.

The church is established next, and the first worship gatherings took place in homes. They welcomed others, as Christ welcomed them.⁹⁰ Hospitality was at the heart of the early church. (I often tell our church-planting students that what they're about to do is attempt to practice hospitality well.)

Finally, why does Paul rebuke Peter to his face? It was because Peter refused to eat with Gentiles, which was more than mere rudeness; it was “not in step with the truth of the gospel.”⁹¹ Paul also scolded the Corinthians because of their unacceptable elitism around the Lord's Supper.⁹² Further, exhortations to practice hospitality are also scattered through the New Testament, as we've already seen in the marriage supper of the Lamb.⁹³

Hospitality Displayed—The Old Testament: So, in Scripture we find God welcoming, feeding, clothing, protecting, befriending, and nourishing people. This is the basis for Christian hospitality. Righteous people follow the Righteous One in every way, including hospitality. The writer of Leviticus tells us of this all-important basis for kingdom hospitality:

“When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, *for you were strangers in the land of Egypt*: I am the LORD your God.”⁹⁴

God tells His people that they should welcome the stranger because that's what He did for them. God's hospitality was the basis for their hospitality.

God's welcoming character is beautifully described in Isaiah 55:1: “Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.” Jesus also gives a similar invitation in the New Testament: “Come to me” (Matt. 11:28). Jesus took on flesh, and entered into culture. He went out, and invited others in.

Consider a few servants who display God-glorifying hospitality in Scripture. In Genesis 18, Abraham entertains three guests, one of whom is the Lord! Joseph welcomes and graciously cares for his brothers, and others, during a famine.⁹⁵ Righteous Job claims, “the sojourner has not lodged in the street; I have opened my doors to the traveler.”⁹⁶ Rahab demonstrates hospitality, offering protection and lodging to Israelite spies in Joshua 2, and demonstrating her loyalty to the God of Israel.⁹⁷ In the book of Ruth, we see a “little redeemer” in Boaz, who feeds the hungry at his table.⁹⁸ Abigail provides hospitality to David and his men in 1 Samuel 25. The widow of Zarephath provides for Elijah in 1 Kings 17, through God’s unending supply of flour and oil. Nehemiah also shows us a picture of the hospitality of a leader, as he provides for 150 men at his table, eating delightful food prepared at his own expense.⁹⁹

My favorite Old Testament example is in the kindness of David, who brings a lame man named Mephibosheth to his table; a beautiful picture of Christ our King inviting us to His table. Mephibosheth expresses the humility of a grace-receiver: “And he paid homage and said, ‘What is your servant, that you should show regard for a dead dog such as I?’”¹⁰⁰ Despite his unworthiness, David welcomed him. The writer concludes: “So Mephibosheth ate at David’s table, like one of the king’s sons. . . . So Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem, for he ate always at the king’s table. Now he was lame in both his feet.”¹⁰¹ None of us deserve the King’s grace either. How should we respond to the immeasurable kindness of Jesus? With humble hearts, and generous hospitality toward the lonely, the broken, and the needy.

Hospitality Displayed—The New Testament: When we get to the New Testament, God’s people are urged to continue this legacy of caring for strangers. When Jesus sent His twelve apostles out to minister in Matthew 10:9–11, He built hospitality into the mission. He emphasizes its importance saying, “Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me.”¹⁰²

Interestingly, one of the qualifications for pastors is “hospitality.”¹⁰³ Think about this. If a guy doesn’t show hospitality, he’s unqualified to serve as pastor. I don’t think I’ve ever heard of a pastoral candidate being asked this question in any serious way. Some churches have guys “preach in view of a call” before they vote on him. But I think a more biblical approach is “live in view of a call.” Strangely, I’ve heard pastors bragging about never having a church member in their home. How foreign such “non-hospitality” is to the New Testament. Pastors should be leading the church in showing hospitality, not neglecting to practice it.

Passages like 1 Peter 4:9 and Romans 12:13 exhort all Christians to welcome others. Peter adds that we must do so “without grumbling.” God didn’t “grumble” when He welcomed us. We should practice it with Christlike joy. The author of Hebrews says something amazing about hospitality, “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.”¹⁰⁴ You never know whom you might entertain! Corporately, James rebukes the church for not showing hospitality to the poor in their corporate gathering. Because of this sin, he called into question the integrity of their faith.¹⁰⁵

Keller points out that Christianity spread in the first century through extended household (*oikos*) evangelism done informally by Christians. He says: “The home could be used for systematic teaching and instruction (Acts 5:42), planned presentations of the gospel to friends and neighbors (Acts 10:22), prayer meetings (Acts 12:12), impromptu evangelistic gatherings (Acts 16:32), follow-up sessions with inquiries (Acts 18:26), evenings devoted to instruction and prayer (Acts 20:7), and fellowship (Acts 21:7).”¹⁰⁶ The early church used their home in remarkably effective and gracious ways.

Resist the temptation of thinking you are too “introverted” for hospitality. This really has nothing to do with personality types, or whether or not you enjoy having company over for dinner. We must see it as a biblical pattern, practiced among all types of God’s

people—who have all types of personalities. My friend Steve Timmis writes and speaks on the centrality of living in community regularly. Yet, he’s a self-professed introvert. His colleague, Tim Chester, has written on hospitality (noted below), yet Steve claims Tim is even more introverted than he is! These men write on community and hospitality, and practice these things, not because they are always “the life of the party,” but because they see these things clearly taught in the Bible. You can be an introvert and practice hospitality.

Hospitality Taught and Exemplified by Jesus: Many don’t see how much Jesus taught and exemplified hospitality. Jesus ate with sinners throughout His earthly ministry.¹⁰⁷ He received children gladly.¹⁰⁸ He taught us to invite the lowly to parties¹⁰⁹ and to welcome strangers.¹¹⁰ He prepared breakfast for His wayward disciples, including Peter who had betrayed Him.¹¹¹ He ate with the Emmaus disciples after His resurrection.¹¹² Before His departure, He said He was going to “prepare a place” for His people.¹¹³ Jesus also instituted the Lord’s Supper, giving new meaning to the Passover meal, and told us that He will drink it again with us when “the kingdom of God comes.”¹¹⁴

Jesus’ miracles were sneak previews of the kingdom of God to come. In the coming kingdom, there will be no demon-possessed men, no storms to calm, no sicknesses to cure, and no tears of the bereaved to wipe. Each time Jesus performed a miracle, He gave us a taste of what’s coming. His first miracle was significantly at a wedding party. The King gave us a glimpse of the ultimate party to come. Happiness, joy, fellowship, and sweet communion with the King awaits His bride.

The promise of enjoying Jesus’ glorious kingdom is made possible by His gracious provision. Paul tells us that we were formerly “strangers . . . having no hope and without God in the world”¹¹⁵ but then adds the good news: “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off *have been brought near* by the blood of Christ.”¹¹⁶ Christ came out to us, to bring us in to the family, at great sacrifice and cost. Now we enjoy the unspeakable privileges of the King’s hospitality.

The question that we must ask ourselves is whether or not we're practicing Jesus-like ministry. Many Christians see Jesus as a personal moral example (and rightly so), but not as a social example. But why not? When you become a Christian, your social life, how you interact with others, should change also. Do you have a reputation for hanging out with shady company for the purpose of showing them grace? Don't get me wrong. I'm not advocating a cavalier spirit, and certainly not condoning sin. But I'm definitely advocating Jesus-like ministry. Jesus was separated from sin, but never isolated from people. And He definitely wasn't the incarnate kill-joy. Sinners loved being with Jesus. The poor and vulnerable found hope in Him. It was the religious neatniks that got upset with Him. What about you? Does your social life look like His?

In his book *Eating Your Way through Luke's Gospel*, Robert Karris says, "In Luke's Gospel, Jesus is either going to a meal, at a meal, or coming from a meal."¹¹⁷ Luke gives particular attention to Jesus' table ministry. Tim Chester reflects on this in *A Meal with Jesus*, as he looks at six particular chapters in Luke (5; 7; 9; 14; 22; 24).¹¹⁸ He poses an interesting question during the introduction, "How would you complete this sentence: The Son of Man came"? Many Christians would answer (1) "The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many,"¹¹⁹ and (2) "The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."¹²⁰ That's correct. But Luke also adds "The Son of Man has come *eating and drinking*."¹²¹ Chester writes: "The first two are statements of purpose. . . . The third statement is a statement of method. . . . His mission strategy was a long meal stretching into the evening. He did evangelism and discipleship 'round a table with some grilled fish, a loaf of bread, and a pitcher of wine."¹²²

Following Jesus includes following His practice of hospitality—joyous, authentic, generous, countercultural, and hope-filled hospitality. When Jesus says, "Come follow me," He isn't calling us to offer a class or start a program, but to follow His way of life. And that way

includes opening up our homes and lives to others. But before we'll do this, we must open our hearts.

Opening Our Hearts

If we aren't showing hospitality, we must ask "Why not?" At the end of the day, it's a heart issue. The goal is to open our hearts to people, not merely pass the potatoes. The reason our hearts aren't opened to people is because our hearts are idol factories. Therefore, to follow Jesus in this way, we need to put five things to death.

Death to Pride: Perhaps the most radical (radical to us, ordinary to Him, ordinary in the Kingdom) thing Jesus said about showing hospitality is found in Luke 14:12–14. Jesus provides this instruction over a meal with the Pharisees. They probably never invited Him back since He offended everyone at the table.

The religious leaders didn't invite Jesus to the table to show Him grace, but to trap Him theologically. However, Jesus exposes their cold hearts, pointing out how they love to twist the law to protect their selfish lifestyle. His response to their Sabbath question leaves them speechless.

But Jesus also exposes the pride of *the guests* of the party, who want seats of honor, and desire praise from people. Then Jesus gives the axiom of the Kingdom:

“For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”¹²³

The ordinary way of the Kingdom is the way of humility, not self-glorification.

As Jesus is at the table, He looks around and proceeds to tell the religious leaders what's wrong with their party. He says that one way you live out kingdom humility is by practicing gracious, countercultural hospitality.

So, He's already rebuked the guests, and now He rebukes *the hosts*:

He said also to the man who had invited him, “When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.”¹²⁴

How’s that for rocking someone’s world? If you’re going to have a party, good. Just remember that you should give preference to the poor.

Was Jesus too extreme? I don’t think so. This has always been God’s desire. Hundreds of years earlier, God rebuked His people for their failure to extend such grace through the prophet Isaiah:

“Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of wickedness,
to undo the straps of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?
*Is it not to share your bread with the hungry
and bring the homeless poor into your house;*
when you see the naked, to cover him,
and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?”¹²⁵

Isaiah confronts the same type of religious hypocrisy that Jesus confronted in Luke 14. Lots of people were doing religious activities, like fasting, but they weren’t showing grace of God to the least of these. The fact that God’s preferences are counter to our own, that we view them as radical or extreme, ought to cause us to question what is ordinary on earth in light of what is ordinary in heaven. Our outrage at God’s preference for the least of these should be the source of our deepest lament.

To clarify, Jesus isn't opposed to you spending time with friends and family. He accepted invitations to His friends' homes regularly. We also see the early church fellowshiping together constantly.¹²⁶ And Jesus told us that the world would know we belong to Him by how we love one another¹²⁷—which implies we need to be with one another.

But don't weaken what Jesus says. Jesus is saying give preference to the poor and vulnerable. If Jesus walked into our parties, banquets, or holiday dinners, I can imagine Him saying, "Great food. Great party. But where are the single moms? Where are the orphans? Where are the special needs children? Where's that snotty-nosed kid down the street, whose dad is imprisoned and his mom is on crack?" We ought to pray, with Jesus, like He did in Matthew 6:10, "Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

John Newton, who knew a few things about amazing grace, was passionate about kingdom hospitality. He said of Luke 14:12–14: "One would almost think that Luke 14:12–14 was not considered part of God's Word . . . nor has any part of Jesus' teaching been more neglected by his own people."¹²⁸

We must collapse the distance between the marginalized and us. Otherwise, we're no different from the Pharisees. How much of the Christian culture is built on climbing the ladder of success? How much of our social practices is built on self-glorification? We simply baptize secular social practices, and as a result have a witness that isn't compelling to the outside world.

We must kill pride, and replace it with a heart of humility. We do this by working the gospel deeply into our hearts. When you realize that you were the poor, bringing nothing to the table when Jesus invited you, then it changes your view of the poor. When you realize that you were the crippled, unable to come to God when He brought you in, then it changes the way you think about the weak. Pharisees don't understand grace. They're often mad, self-righteous, and elitist.

Grace-driven people are happy, humble, and hospitable to the poor and weak.

Death to Paybacks: Another problem that people have with showing generous hospitality is that our sinful hearts want paid back for everything. Much of our social life is built around reciprocity. “If I do this, then will you do that?” But Jesus says that we should invite the least of these “because they cannot repay you.”¹²⁹ He reminds us that our reward is elsewhere, saying, “you will be blessed” and “you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.”¹³⁰

Jesus tells us elsewhere that if you try to do everything out of the law of return, then we’re no different than unbelievers.¹³¹ Instead we must give expecting nothing in return, remembering that our reward is heaven. He says: “Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.”¹³²

Hospitality is war. It’s not the path of least resistance. Because of this reality, you better have some deeper, more sustainable motivations for doing it. God-centered motives like longing to glorify the mercy of the Father, living for another reward, and delighting to obey God’s Word satisfies and sustains the hearts of disciples.

I often hear people talking about adoption in romantic ways. They wrongly think that a child “will fill the hole in their heart.” I want to tell such prospective parents that they should get a dog instead of a child. Chances are, if you adopt children, do foster care, or simply welcome that functionally fatherless girl down the street, then you probably won’t hear sweet, soft-playing music in the background.

You should play *Gladiator* music instead. It will be a struggle probably. You might sleep with one eye opened for a while. But remember, we don’t care for children because of what we can get. We do it because we’re citizens of the kingdom of God, and He calls us to love our neighbors as ourselves. We do it to show the world what our King is like, and what He has done for us. And if we have any longing for reward, we need to remember that it won’t ultimately come in this life, but in the next.

To practice hospitality, we must die to reciprocity. Our guests may never say, “Thanks.” They may eat all our food. They may stain our carpet. They may make us weep with grief. That’s okay. We’re doing this out of love for the person, because we value eternity more than this passing life, because we’re simply stewards of God’s provisions, and because we love the King.

If you live this way, you’ll begin to understand the nature of grace in a powerful way. Paul Zahl says, “Grace is love that seeks you out when you have nothing to give in return.”¹³³ That’s how Jesus has loved us. And that’s how we’re to love the world. Invite others in, seeking nothing in return. Work Jesus’ grace into your heart deeply that you may work it out on others similarly.

Death to Sensationalism: Christians often gravitate to “the extraordinary.” Of course, seeing lives changed by the gospel is extraordinary to us, but many go from event to event, program to program, trying to quench their sensationalistic appetites. But mission usually doesn’t involve doing sensational acts; it involves simple, ordinary acts done with a heart of love.

People often come to our church and ask, “How can I get plugged in?” This question is sometimes another way of asking, “What program can I get involved with, or what kind of events do you all have?” But we don’t have programs. I’m not opposed to programs, for there’s nothing wrong with them. But many confuse mission for busyness. My typical response is this: “Eat with lots of people this week.” They often have a puzzled look. I gently tell them that we don’t want a lot of programs during the week because we want people to live out this mission during the week.

At our church in Raleigh, we’ve adopted the quote I alluded to in the introduction from Chester and Timmis as our posture for mission. Here it is again:

Most gospel ministry involves *ordinary people doing ordinary things* with gospel intentionality.¹³⁴

In other words, mission isn't always astonishing. It might look like a barbecue, or a neighborhood basketball game, or going grocery shopping for your neighbor. But these ordinary things can have extraordinary effects. That's why international missionaries rejoice when a local non-believer comes to their home for dinner. That's a big deal. We need to adopt this same missionary posture. What do international missionaries do? They serve the poor, and they evangelize people, and often one or both involves eating with people, or serving food to them. It's a lot like the ministry of Jesus. He didn't run programs or start institutions. He ate with people.

I love how Paul says to the Thessalonians, "We were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves."¹³⁵ For some, evangelism is gospel with no life—megaphone preaching, handing out tracts, or street evangelism. For others, evangelism is life with no gospel. They equate doing lunch with doing mission. But Paul gives us a nice pattern here: Live life among others, as we speak the gospel to them. Hospitality is one way to do this.

Some assume hospitality is "too small" for them. Big shots might think that it's a complete waste of time. But it's actually the wisest investment of your time. What's more important than caring for people made in God's image, especially the poor and the weak, and sharing the most important message in the entire world with them? Further, Jesus tells us that eternal rewards are in view when it comes to inviting others to our parties. We have extraordinary motives for doing ordinary mission.

On a practical level, we need to die to the pressure of having sensational entertainment. Many fear that they can't do hospitality because they don't have a big enough home, or they can't serve a rich enough meal. But remember again, hospitality isn't entertaining. Entertaining is often about showing off. Hospitality is about showing grace. Serve your guests the best you can, but remember the focus is on welcoming and loving Zacchaeus and Levi, the prostitute and the

orphan, not whether you serve them a filet or a hot dog. Don't let the financial cost rob you of the duty and blessing of hospitality.

Death to Partiality: Our refusal to open our doors often comes from a refusal to open our hearts to those who don't look like us. But the Christ-follower should celebrate diversity, not despise it. One of the most beautiful displays of the gospel is when you hang out with people that make others wonder, "Why is he with that guy?" Jesus received the same questions. People didn't invite the poor to parties. They served them out the back door. Jews didn't hang out with Samaritans, but Jesus was willing to share the same cup with a shady lady in John 4.

In encouraging you to practice hospitality, I'm encouraging you to learn how to befriend people who aren't like you. You won't show hospitality if you don't like people, and they don't like you. Jesus was a "friend of sinners."¹³⁶ He attracted all sorts of people, and they loved His company, even though He often spoke hard truth to them.

If you don't have any friends that are of a different race, age, or economic status, then ask yourself, "Why not?" Is it impossible because of your context, or do you have a heart problem? Many times churches champion diversity, and that's a good thing. But we need more than a few diverse people on a stage singing songs. We need diverse *friends* who watch *Monday Night Football* at our house. Diverse friends who put their feet up on our furniture and open our fridge. We need to have a meal with the homosexual in order to listen to her and share the glory of God's truth and love.

The first step in overcoming your prejudices toward someone of a different, race, class, part of the nation, or political party, is to admit you have prejudices. Remember that the gospel transcends these boundaries. Remember Jesus loved us when we were unlovely. Remember that Jesus loves diversity, and that heaven will be populated with every tribe and tongue. Practice now a foretaste of what we will enjoy then.

This way of life may sound like youthful zeal or impractical, but if it does, could it be because we've allowed the culture to shape our views more than the gospel? Would others call you "a friend of sinners"? If not, then perhaps you should examine your heart. Our social life is illustrating how much we look like Jesus, and how well we understand the kingdom of God.

Death to Self-Indulgence: We must kill this idea, "My home is my refuge." I often hear people say that. It's idolatry. Jesus is our refuge. We need to open our homes to people.

When you replace *stewardship* for *ownership* you won't practice hospitality.¹³⁷ The Christian knows he or she owns nothing. We're stewards of God's possessions, including our homes. The question is not "How much money should I give to advance the Kingdom?" but "How much of God's money should I keep for myself?" And not, "What's the least I can do for people?" But "How many people can I possibly have in the home God provided, and how many people can I serve with God's resources?"

It's not a sin to have a big home. It's a great blessing, and a wonderful tool for loving a broken world. Do you view your home as "the king in his castle," building a moat in order to keep people out? Or are you saying, "My King is Jesus, all may enter in!"

Jesus is better than any comfort you have. Believe that. You don't need a bigger TV and a more comfortable recliner in your "man-cave." You need a bigger front door, and more seats filled around the table. Rest in Jesus, as you pour yourself out for the physically and spiritually needy.

Opening Our Doors

Allow me to conclude the chapter by providing some practical ways to do kingdom hospitality with faithfulness and grace. While we should always be ready to open our doors to traveling missionaries, for hosting small group Bible studies, and for hosting our families for

extended periods of time, allow me to challenge you beyond these noble practices.

Foster Care: In the next chapter, I'll talk about orphan care more specifically, but for now consider foster care. Today I met with a lady who started a nonprofit to help American foster-care children. I learned that on any given day there are more than 450,000 children in the U.S. Foster Care system. More than 100,000 are waiting to be adopted. It's not uncommon for a child to travel through five or more homes. And get this: Each year, nearly 30,000 children will turn eighteen and age out of the Foster Care System with only a check for \$500! Because \$500 won't last long, and because these kids have no where to go, it's not surprising that many foster kids end up in a life of crime, prostitution, or gang life.

Believers should be asking, "Why shouldn't I do foster care?" What's keeping you from it? It can't be the financial cost. It's free, and it comes with many financial benefits, like college tuition and monthly stipends. Sure, it's challenging, but think about these kids. They've been tossed around from home to home, locked in closets, shut out of the house, and physically abused; and often have a depressed look of hopelessness. They're also vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. Do you not have room at the table for a foster child? If it's impossible for you to foster, then what can you do to promote foster care? Can you contact the local agencies and see what needs they have? Can your church begin pursuing possible ways to promote foster care in the local church? Are there other ways you can show hospitality to at-risk children?²¹³⁸

Aftercare: Often when we hear about human trafficking, we feel overwhelmed and disconnected because the problem is so vast and it seems like a job for politicians, law enforcement, or lawyers. While we certainly need Wilberforce-like servants in these arenas, there are other wonderful ways you can help. One way is aftercare.

When girls are rescued from sex trafficking, we can only imagine the shame and brokenness they feel. What do they need? Among

other things, they need friendship, love, the good news of Jesus, and a local church that does community well.

Over the past year, I've seen the blessing of having a community of faith pour into two girls that were rescued from human trafficking. They were placed in a local aftercare facility. Some of the leaders brought these girls to corporate worship, and they were incorporated into our faith community. On several occasions, they've had dinner at our house. In an effort to give relief to their house leaders, they've also stayed overnight at our house on a few occasions. These girls, and others like them, need love, and they need to see what a healthy family looks like.

Are there any aftercare facilities in your area? Would you consider contacting them and asking how you can help? Perhaps you would consider starting an aftercare facility. We're in the early stages of doing this as a church right now. We're praying for a facility, the finances, and the workers. In Haiti, we're working with a terrific organization called Help One Now, and they're doing victim aftercare. They've built several little homes for girls who have been trafficked across the border of Haiti into the Dominican Republic. We need aftercare facilities locally and globally.

Transitional Assistance: Along with these ministries, various forms of transitional assistance remain a great need. Foster-care children and aged-out orphans have nowhere to go. They need jobs. They need community. Some are told lies and promised jobs, but are kidnapped, abused, and sold. I have friends who have started business in impoverished countries for the purpose of providing a place of employment for orphans who have aged out of orphanages. This remains one of the great needs in orphan care.

Other forms of transitional assistance include serving prisoners who have exited the prison system. As with all forms of hospitality, one needs to use wisdom, and this is certainly the case. But don't let fear keep you from serving the prisoner.

Steve Timmis told me of a time in which he invited a former prisoner to stay at his house for a few weeks. He set guidelines. This guest could never be at their home when the family was away, for example. Timmis even had his daughter put her dresser in front of her door at night. Despite the possibility of danger, he welcomed this man and tried to help him get on his feet. If you aren't ready for this, then you might consider volunteering at a halfway house. These places often need volunteers to serve former prisoners who are transitioning.

Hosting Internationals: Some report that nearly 80 percent of the 500,000 international students never set foot in an American home.¹³⁹ Are we really that inhospitable as a culture? Some institutions are trying to correct this unacceptable reality. They are seeking to reach out to locals, encouraging them to invite international students over for dinner. Have you looked into this personally? Do you have a school in your area with international students? Does the school already have an organization dedicated to serving internationals? Perhaps you could contact them and see what ways you could serve. We've served Thanksgiving dinner to internationals at NC State. We've sought to invite many to our homes for dinner. It's always an incredible experience.

In addition to serving international students, you may also have opportunity to serve international refugees. Recently, one of our small groups embraced a family of refugees from Baghdad. The group leader was made aware of the need through the World Relief organization. So the group went to the airport and greeted a dad, mom, and three kids (who spoke no English). These refugees, like others, need furniture, ESL training, transportation, and many other practical necessities. You or a group may consider serving refugees in this way too. What a wonderful way to welcome the sojourner.

Other Acts of Neighbor Love: Finally, there are a number of ways to show hospitality locally. You should also host the elderly, or in some cases, go visit them. Regular visits to the elderly, and to the

widow, are wonderful ways to show neighbor love and to live out God's Word.

You should also consider ways to serve and love veterans, and those with mental and physical needs. I know of one church that does a prom every year for special needs kids.

Your local police force is another group that you should consider serving. They need to know that people in the church care, and that God's people are praying for them. In addition to this, the church will be made aware of several needs in the community through interacting with them.

You might also consider doing a block party in a difficult part of town. When I was in New Orleans, we cooked a huge pot of red beans and rice and a bunch of us went into one of the roughest public housing developments in the city. Kids came from everywhere. I remember one kid named Anthony ran up and jumped in my arms saying, "Give me a nickel." I gave him a nickel. Then he said, "Give me another nickel, that nickel's dirty!" After going through all my nickels, we played ball until it was dark. As our team was leaving the area, we went back to our SUV. The kids followed us all the way there, and were hanging on the vehicle, not wanting us to leave. As we drove back to our dorms, we passed several church buildings. I just wondered how much was being done for these kids. I prayed for the church to get out of the pews and get into the projects more and more.

There are a hundred other ways to practice hospitality for the good of your neighbors. Our small group just did a chili cook-off for the purpose of reaching out to our friends and neighbors. Over fifty people showed up at my house. It was a fun evening of tasting various recipes and meeting new folks.

Consider using occasions to practice hospitality: birthday parties, housewarming parties, sporting events, or seasonal events (Thanksgiving dinner, Fourth of July celebration, or Christmas dinner). Make up a reason. Have a board-game night, a movie night, or a can-jam tournament. Don't underestimate the power of inviting your

neighbors to do ordinary things with you, as you seek to show and share the gospel in a natural and authentic way.

As you bow your head for your next meal, perhaps you could utter this prayer to keep you mindful of the broken world around us: “Father, we thank You for this meal in a world that’s hungry. We thank You for friends in a world that’s lonely. We thank You for the light of Christ in a world that’s in darkness. In Jesus’ name, Amen.” May God fill us with sensitivity and love, and may we fill our homes with Mephibosheths. And when He does, look at your guest, and remember the King’s words:

“For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me . . . as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.”¹⁴⁰

When you see the King, you won’t regret having practiced kingdom hospitality.

NOTES

82. Isaiah 25:6, 8.
83. See Luke 14:12–24.
84. Genesis 3:21.
85. Keller, *Ministries of Mercy*, 41.
86. Ibid.
87. Exodus 29:5.
88. Exodus 33:3.
89. Luke 7:34.
90. See Romans 15:7; 16:5.
91. Galatians 2:11–14.
92. See 1 Corinthians 11:17–34.
93. See Romans 12:13; 1 Peter 4:9.
94. Leviticus 19:33–34, my emphasis.

95. See Genesis 47.
96. Job 31:32.
97. See also James 2:25.
98. Ruth 2:14.
99. Nehemiah 5:14–19.
100. 2 Samuel 9:8.
101. 2 Samuel 9:11, 13.
102. Matthew 10:40.
103. 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8.
104. Hebrews 13:2.
105. See James 2:1–26.
106. Tim Keller, *Center Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 278.
107. Mark 2:13–17; Luke 15:1–2.
108. Mark 9:37.
109. Luke 14:12–14.
110. Matthew 25:35.
111. John 21.
112. Luke 24:13–34.
113. John 14:3.
114. Luke 22:18.
115. Ephesians 2:12.
116. Ephesians 2:13, my emphasis.
117. Robert Karris, *Eating Your Way through Luke's Gospel* (Collegetown, MN: Liturgical Press, 2006).
118. Quoted in *A Meal with Jesus* by Tim Chester (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011), Kindle edition.
119. Mark 10:45.
120. Luke 19:10.
121. Luke 7:34, my emphasis.
122. Chester, *A Meal with Jesus*, Kindle edition.
123. Luke 14:11.
124. Luke 14:12–14.
125. Isaiah 58:6–7, my emphasis.
126. Acts 2:42.
127. John 13:34–35.
128. Keller, *Generous Justice*, 46.
129. Luke 14:14.
130. Ibid.
131. Luke 6:27–36.
132. Luke 6:36.
133. Paul Zahl, *Grace in Practice* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), Kindle edition.
134. Chester and Timmis, *Total Church*, 63, my emphasis.
135. 1 Thessalonians 2:8.

136. Matthew 11:19.

137. I heard my friend Steve Timmis use this phrase at a lecture, along with the point about “our home is not our refuge.”

138. You may consider Safe Families for Children network. Safe Families is intended to help at-risk children, and to help their parents get the necessary resources they need in order to maintain custody of their children. Host families can help parents who need to temporarily place their child in a home, due to unmanageable and harsh circumstances. Your family may be able to provide a temporary residence for a child, which typically lasts about six weeks. Unlike foster care, this placement is temporary, you receive no compensation, and the parents voluntarily place their children into selected homes. For more information, see Safe Families for Children and Bethany Christian Services.

139. “International Friendship Program.” See <http://www.iss.purdue.edu/Programs/IFP>, accessed Dec. 2, 2013.

140. Matthew 25:35–36, 40.