

Gospel Hospitality

Hospitality is a forgotten art. It also has a lost biblical history. We can recover the art of hospitality by understanding what it is and discerning how the gospel changes our notions of hospitality. In general, hospitality is about treating strangers as equals by creating space for them to be protected, provided for, and taken care of, followed by assisting and guiding them to their next destination. Let's see how this holds up to scripture.

The Origin of Hospitality

There is a lot of history to consider in understanding the act or art of hospitality, but it all goes back to the beginning. In [Genesis 1-2](#), we discern God's first hospitable act. Consider what God did when he created the world and the garden of Eden for humanity to live in it. He gave Adam and Eve all they needed to enjoy life restfully while doing the work He created them for. He gave them space to exist, to enjoy creation, and to enjoy each other and fellowship with Him. They were given both the space and the capability to create, to work, and to exercise authority, with all the resources necessary they needed.

Israel: God's Hospitable People

Consider God's commands to His people regarding hospitality to strangers ([Lev 19:9-10, 33-34](#); [Deut 10:18-19](#)). Through Abraham and Sarah, God created a new nation – a People blessed to be a blessing to all nations. He gave them all the resources and capabilities to exercise hospitality to strangers, orphans, and widows. Similar to the Garden experience, Israel offered His people a place of refuge where others could rest and receive all they needed, enabling them to do what God had created them to do. However, now this rest came in the midst of a broken, sinful world.

On the flip side, think of the number of occasions where Israel found itself as the strangers among a host people. In some cases they found a hospitable reception (Egypt with Joseph in charge; the spies and Rahab). In other cases they found themselves treated like enemies or slaves (Slavery in Egypt; Babylonian Captivity). God had called them to be hospitable, yet they often failed to do so. After, receiving hospitality this must have become clearer to them.

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God allows us to experience grace as recipients so that we might be distributors of grace to others. Hospitality toward Israel was a clear example of God's gracious gift, once again, and should have motivated generous hospitality. Unfortunately, Israel failed to enter God's rest because of their unbelief and disobedience ([Heb 4](#)). So, they not only failed to rest in the work of God, but also failed to offer that rest to other nations. In all their hospitable failures, they needed one who would fully rest in God in order to become an enduring place of refuge for others.

Rethinking Hospitality with Jesus

Jesus entered into a culture shaped by a variety of world views (The Imperial Cult, Jewish Monotheism, and Hellenistic Philosophy to name a few). In this culture, the concept of hospitality was rooted in several different traditions. First, **the idea of taking in a hostile stranger or enemy** and treating him as you would yourself. Second, the Greek practice of hospitality in which **a stranger passing outside a Greek house would be invited inside the house by the family**. The host washed the stranger's feet and offered him/her food and wine. Only after the stranger was feeling comfortable, could the host ask his or her name. This practice stemmed from the thought that the gods mingled among men, and if you played a poor host to a deity, you would incur the wrath of a god.

A third shaping force in the concept of hospitality in Jesus' day was **the Hebrew understanding** (as briefly considered in the passages above and demonstrated also in the story of Lot and the angels— [Genesis 19](#)). Jesus comes into this cultural context and calls the weary to himself, feeds the hungry, mends the broken, eats with sinners and tax collectors, washes his disciples' feet...and ultimately gives his life to cleanse us from sin, deal with our unbelief and provide a way and place for us to rest. Jesus lives, loves, obeys, works, dies, and rises again so that we might find a place of rest, renewal and recreation. He offers us rest in order to send us on our way to be about God's purposes – rescued to offer rest. Jesus saved us to be His Hospitable People!

3 Ways the Church Can be Hospitable

In light of the gospel, we might define hospitality as the creation of a space that allows people **to BE themselves, to BECOME renewed, and to DO the works** God has saved them for. When we properly exercise hospitality, we welcome people to be themselves in the warmth of the light of Christ, to become renewed by being changed by the work of Christ, and to do works we have been created for in Christ.

TO BE RESTED

In a broken world, marred and diseased by the effects of sin, people need the space to rest. This is why Jesus called people who were weary and heavy-laden to come to him. He would give them rest for their weary souls. Jesus calls us to rest in His work on our behalf so we can be a people at rest who provide sanctuaries of rest for others.

Before the Fall, Adam and Eve were naked and unashamed. God had created a place and made space for them to be themselves without covering or facades. If we are in Christ, we are clothed with His righteousness. We don't need to cover up or hide. One of the ways we create space for people to experience and come to understand the gospel is by creating space for people to reveal their true self and see that they are loved regardless of the "wrinkles and scars" of sin. How do we create space for people to be their true self?

TO BECOME RENEWED

The gospel isn't *only* about loving and forgiving sinners. It is also about restoring broken and

marred people into healed and whole people who grow up to become imitators of Jesus Christ – restored image bearers of God. Jesus created space for people to be and to become (Think of Mary, Peter, Thomas, the woman at the well, the blind man, the paralyzed). Gospel hospitality implies creating space for people to be known, to be real, to be loved, and ultimately to be led with the Holy Spirit's help to healing and wholeness through the work and person of Jesus Christ. How do we create space for people to be led toward healing and wholeness?

TO DO WORKS

The gospel moves from who God is and what Christ has done on our behalf into the works He created us to do (See [Ephesians 2:8-10](#)).

This is the result of Jesus' gospel hospitality. He got on the same level with his enemy – becoming human. He became our servant – to the point of death. He spent all that He had in order to clean us up – by becoming our sin and giving us His righteousness ([2 Cor 5:21](#)). Then He sent us His Spirit to empower us to do good works for His sake so others could be welcomed in to the family. When we engage in gospel hospitality, we are regularly asking ourselves this question:

How do we create space for the stranger to be rested, restored, healed, and prepared in Jesus Christ for the work God has called them to?

Will you join God's rich history of providing rest in order to extend rest? Remember, everything he has called you to do he has already done for you in Christ Jesus. **You have everything you need to offer gospel hospitality to the strangers, friends, and even enemies around you.**

Read more from Jeff [here](#).