

The Gift of Hospitality (9)

A gifted story: "Mom, there's an old guy at the back door," young Pete's voice sounded anxious. Meribel went straight to the door and welcomed the stranger in. "Set yourself down here in the kitchen," she said warmly. "I've got something here I think you'll like." Then she carved him a big slice of ham and heaped freshly-cooked beans on the plate with a thick piece of homemade bread on the side. It was a ritual Meribel went through often when "tramps" came by, as they often did because the word was out that she was a kindly lady. Years before, when her father disappeared one day, she vowed never to let a stranger go hungry. God gave her the gift of hospitality.

Biblical references:

1 Peter 4:9-10— ***Open your homes to each other** without complaining. Each one, as a good manager of God's different gifts, must use for the good of others the special gift he has received from God.*

Hebrews 13:2— *Remember to **welcome strangers in your homes**. There were some who did that and welcomed angels without knowing it.*

Romans 16:23— *My host Gaius, in whose house the church meets, sends you his greetings...*

Genesis 18:1-15— *The Lord appeared to Abraham at the sacred trees of Mamre. As Abraham was sitting at the entrance of his tent during the hottest part of the day, he looked up and saw three men standing there. As soon as he saw them, he ran out to meet them. Bowing down with his face touching the ground, he said, "Sirs, please do not pass by my home without stopping; I am here to serve you. Let me bring some water for you to wash your feet; you can rest here beneath this tree. I will also bring a bit of food; it will give you strength to continue your journey. You have honored me by coming to my home, so let me serve you."*

Definition and comment:

The gift of Hospitality: the special gift whereby the Holy Spirit enables certain Christians to open their homes willingly and offer lodging, food, and fellowship cheerfully to other people. This gift causes the believer to joyfully open his or her home for meetings and overnight visitors, making people feel welcome and comfortable. Guests and strangers are graciously served.

The Greek word for "hospitality" is *philoxenia*, meaning, "love of strangers." The hospitable person is comfortable entertaining others—family, relatives, friends to be sure, but most especially when welcoming strangers. People with this gift have a special sensitivity with others, and they know how to make people feel at ease and wanted. Making strangers feel comfortable and at home takes the form of a ministry that helps dispel loneliness and builds a sense of community.

Hospitality was not mentioned specifically as a gift in scripture, but there is wide acceptance of hospitality as a gift because it was used effectively to build up the body and also for community ministry. All Christians should be hospitable to one another—it is a Christian

duty to be kind to strangers. Some Christians, however, feel drawn to reach out to strangers and to invite them into their home—evidence of a supernatural gift.

Affirm that you have this gift; questions to ask yourself:

Do you enjoy providing a haven for guests and not feel imposed upon by unexpected visitors?

Do you have a knack for making strangers feel at ease in your home and at church?

Are you sensitive to the acts of kindness which make people feel comfortable?

Is your home usually open to people passing through who need a place to stay?

Do you enjoy participating in church suppers or other events that welcome people to the church?

Areas for study and personal growth:

Study scriptural references to hospitality to gain a full appreciation of all that is implied in “loving strangers” as well as who should and should not be extended this courtesy: Rom. 12:13; 1 Pet. 4:9; Heb. 13:2; 1 Tim. 3:2, 5:10; Titus 1:8; Genesis 18:1-115; 2 John 10-11; 3 John 5-8, 10. Pay particular attention to the story of Aquila and Priscilla in Acts 18:24-26.

Learn about what it takes to be truly hospitable. Contemplate ways in which you can insure that those invited into your home will be given the best of care and service and will enjoy themselves. Understanding that this is a gift you have been given, do all you can to exercise it at the highest level.

Expand your abilities for entertaining by developing a file of recipes for different tastes, having on hand a variety of games and activities for a wide range of interests, and create a space utilization plan for how you will shuffle family or furniture quickly to accommodate unexpected guests. Train the family so that they know how to assist in creating a warm welcome when the need arises.

Become aware of the hospitality needs of the church, and make known your willingness to house people in need of overnight lodging. Offer your home for specific church-related gatherings (bible study, meetings, and fellowship), and make suggestions that would create opportunities for you to use your special gift.

Develop a special ministry of your own that will capitalize on your gift of hospitality—for instance, bring together new church members for a social evening to help them get to know one another.

General ways to use the gift of hospitality:

Personally: display gracious openness to strangers; entertain in your home; welcome into your home.

Within the church: be a greeter; make welcome calls to prospective members; help new members become oriented to and incorporated into the church (see more specific church service opportunities in the Booklet *Channels for Using the Gifts*).

Within the wider community: befriend foreign students; become involved in refugee resettlement; volunteer at a nursing home to offer companionship to the elderly.

For reflection:

Hospitality could be called the “making friends gift” because it is the great bridge-builder

between people. Perhaps it was the quality tapped in olden times when a “match-maker” was employed to bring a boy and girl together. Most people have a natural reluctance or shyness when it comes to meeting people or approaching others about possibly getting together. There is a fear of rejection. But on neutral territory it is natural to converse, the first step in making friendships. People with the gift of hospitality can offer that neutral territory by bringing lonely folks into their homes and helping them mingle with others. It is a great service.

Graciousness is a wonderful quality that is born out of a genuine love for others. People with the gift of hospitality just simply like people, and it shows. They are involved in uplifting spirits, and they are good at it because God gave them a special pizzazz or charisma (which means gifted) that enables them to help people feel included and enjoyed as persons.

And so the stranger comes along, doesn’t know anyone in the area, no one to talk with, and destined for a lonely night—probably he doesn’t even feel like going out to eat alone. But maybe God will lead the stranger to his disciple with the gift of hospitality. It is easy to see how the evening would be gloriously changed as a result. To be touched in this fashion in the name of Christ is time-honored as a means of introducing people to him. Christianity spread throughout the world, not by crowds talking to crowds, but by individual Christians making friends, being friends, and bringing their new friends to Christ. Bringing someone into your home is an unmistakable act of friendship. No wonder God bestows it as a special gift!