

HOSPITALITY

Discipleship

ONE WELCOME AT A TIME



BRYANT RUEDA

Hospitality: Discipleship One Welcome at a Time

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To all those who *welcomed* me and my family

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FOREWORD

As someone who has been welcomed into Bryant's home it is not surprising for me to have read this book considering a practice and posture that is a priority of his home. Bryant and his family have welcomed individuals of different backgrounds, ages, and cultures and I have seen first-hand the blessing of being welcomed by him in company and as a friend.

In his work, Bryant addresses a sentiment that every individual longs to feel, that of feeling welcomed. As children, we desire to feel welcomed on the sandlot or in the classroom and as an adult we desire to feel welcomed by our peers in almost every facet of life. In this book Bryant helps guide us in the practicality of considering how to consider, implement, and develop a character that looks to welcome others.

As Christians, the practice of hospitality is one that we should consider and practice as this is an aspect of the heart of God. We see God forms the world and creates mankind to dwell with Him in His Garden. But after sin appears and fellowship is broken, God provides His Son so that we, who were once enemies, might be welcomed back as sons and daughters.

If you've picked up this book, it's because you're willing to grow and be challenged in the way of hospitality. I pray that you will receive the same encouragement that I did in reading this book, and who knows, maybe you'll even get invited to Bryant's home someday.

Justin Flores
Pastor
FBC Irving

DEFINING HOSPITALITY

"Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God" (Romans 15:7)

A Welcoming Definition

What is hospitality? Hospitality is the *posture and act of welcoming* others into your life.

Hospitality is first and foremost a posture of the heart that says, *"You are welcome here."* This initial posture can lead to further acts of welcoming others into your life. It can take you from saying, *"You are welcome here,"* to saying, *"You are welcome into my life."* Before you get there, you must first acknowledge the fact that it is impossible to welcome everyone into your life. Nevertheless, we are all called to cultivate a willingness to welcome all at some level.

Why? Because the Bible portrays hospitality not merely as social etiquette but as a *divine mandate*. The biblical sense of hospitality goes beyond that of merely entertaining friends. It includes welcoming the stranger, the overlooked, and the weary. As Joe Thorn writes:

Hospitality is often treated as an issue of manners. We believe we should be hospitable because it is the polite thing to do. Worse than that, many of us claim to be introverts and give ourselves a pass on the practice. But according to Scripture, hospitality is not a matter of manners; it is about mission.¹

Hospitality is *missional* in that it reflects God's goodness and welcoming grace towards us in Christ. We were all estranged from God because of sin but now have been welcomed into the fold of God by the goodness and grace of God.

This *welcoming grace* and *love of strangers* is what those still estranged from God need to hear and see. Rosaria C. Butterfield reminds us of this temporary and earthly reality when she writes that “for Christians to maintain an authentic Christian witness to a world that mistrusts us (at the very least), we must be transparently hospitable.”² Like Christ, we too, are to be a people that authentically “receives sinners and eats with them” (Luke 15:2). Welcoming others in the name of Christ can serve

¹Joe Thorn, *The Life of the Church: The Table, Pulpit, and Square* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2017), 29.

²Rosaria C. Butterfield, *The Gospel Comes with a House Key: Practicing Radically Ordinary Hospitality in Our Post-Christian World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 32.

as a simple but tangible expression of the gospel to unbelievers.

A gospel welcome can also lead to gospel communion as Paul describes in 1 Thessalonians 2:8: “So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us.” The combination of the right posture with a courageous willingness to welcome others in Christ can lead to such an affectionate communion with one another in Christ.

A Welcoming Spectrum

To better grasp all of this, it is helpful to view hospitality on a *spectrum*. On one side are small, ordinary gestures like a smile at church, remembering a neighbor’s name, or offering a seat to someone new. On the other side are larger commitments like opening your home to long-term guests, fostering children, or regularly hosting a group for regular meals. Each act, whether small or large, reflects the same truth: *God’s people are called to be welcoming people.*

Consider this calling from the following verses:

1. **Leviticus 19:34:** “The stranger who dwells among you shall be to you as one born

among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.”

In this Old Testament command, “stranger” refers to a sojourner, resident alien, or temporary resident. This was typically a foreigner integrated into Israelite communities but without full land rights, often vulnerable to exploitation. God mandates treating them as native-born kin. Here we can see how hospitality can help *transform “visitors” into kin*, ensuring that no one dwells among our local churches as an outsider.

2. **Matthew 25:35-36, 40:** “for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me... And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.’”

In the ancient Near East, hospitality was a cultural and religious duty, but Jesus here elevates it to a kingdom imperative. Such

welcoming (and visiting) is to be demonstrated to His “brethren.” Who are His brethren in this context? Believers in general, but more specifically those persecuted for preaching the gospel. We can practice hospitality by serving the King’s servants in these ways.

3. **Romans 12:13**: “distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality.”

The verb here (translated as “given”) conveys eager pursuit, like a hunter chasing prey. “Hospitality” here highlights the deliberate outreach to the outsiders *within* the faith family. In other words, we are to be given to the *eager pursuit* of showing love to strangers within the local church. An implication of this is that the local church should be prioritized in our practice of hospitality.

4. **1 Timothy 3:2**: “A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach;”

Hospitality here is a *required qualification* (see Titus 1:8 as well) for the elders of the church. Elders are to *model* hospitality in the

church. “Hospitable” here implies an open home as a *ministry hub* since family life is part of the immediate context. All believers are to imitate their leaders in this.

5. **Hebrews 13:2:** “Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels.”

“Stranger” here broadly refers to a foreigner, guest, or someone unknown. This would often be a traveler or outsider who does not have local connections. In the first-century context, this referred to commissioned itinerant preachers (missionaries) or vulnerable wanderers who depended on hospitality amid scarce and even unsafe inns. This exhortation reminds us of the potential *eternal impact* of opening one's home (see Abraham in Genesis 18).

6. **1 Peter 4:9:** “Be hospitable to one another without grumbling.”

Here we are again reminded of the *posture* of hospitality. Hospitality is to be a cheerful and ungrudging welcome *even amid trials* such as the ones the believers here were experiencing. We are to be mindful of the motives behind our practice of hospitality.

Sin and suffering can hinder hospitality if we are not watchful.

7. **3 John 5–8:** “Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren and for strangers, who have borne witness of your love before the church... We therefore ought to receive such, that we may become fellow workers for the truth.”

In this context, “stranger” specifically refers to traveling teachers or fellow believers from afar who are preaching the gospel and are not from our local church. John commends Gaius (1-4) for *supporting them* and warns against the lack of hospitality as seen in Diotrephes' example (9-10).

Practicing hospitality here is a way of becoming “fellow workers for the truth.” It is a way of partnering with one another for the gospel.

Conclusion

In summary, every act, from greeting to visiting and from pursuing to hosting, declares that God's people are indeed called to be welcoming. In these ways, we show that hospitality truly is the *posture and act of welcoming* others into our lives.

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DOING HOSPITALITY

*“So continuing daily with one accord in the temple,
and breaking bread from house to house, they ate
their food with gladness and simplicity of heart,”*
(Acts 2:46)

Welcoming Spaces

Hospitality should be viewed on a spectrum. The same is true of the context in which it takes place: Christian community. As Joseph Myers explains in his book, *The Search to Belong: Rethinking Intimacy, Community, and Small Groups*, we experience community in four relational spaces: public, social, personal, and intimate.

This *spectrum of community* is not meant to be understood as hierarchical stages to progress through but simultaneous, overlapping layers where people experience connection, commitment, participation, and significance in varying degrees. Myers argues that healthy relationships and healthy communities emerge when individuals are free to form meaningful bonds in *all* spaces, without

forcing intimacy or undervaluing the different spaces.³

What are these *relational spaces* and how can we practice hospitality in each?

- **Public Space:** Here larger groups experience community together rooted in *shared rituals, experiences, and identities* without deep personal disclosure. Examples of this are worship services, concerts, sports events, and other large gatherings. Practicing hospitality in this space means offering a smile, a greeting, or creating an environment where newcomers feel safe to show up. Here, simple acts like welcoming from the pulpit, leading everyone in attendance to participate together, and having someone at the door saying, “We’re glad you’re here” can all make a difference. This is a space where we can meet and greet people who we may potentially invite to join us in other communal spaces.
- **Social Space:** Here smaller groups engage in selective sharing of “snapshots” (of each other’s lives), build on first impressions and

³Joseph R. Myers, *The Search to Belong: Rethinking Intimacy, Community, and Small Groups* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 35–58.

mutual interests, and are more neighborly in their interactions. This space allows people to choose who enters their closer circles while maintaining boundaries. This space acts as a “filter” for potential deeper relationships. Examples of this are catechism classes, seminars, bible studies, book studies, and other similar meetings. Practicing hospitality in this space means intentional small talk, genuine attention in conversation, finding shared interests, building trust over multiple conversations, and slowly welcoming people into your life without forcing intimacy. Here you continue to meet others at a slower pace and invite a few into a more personal space.

- **Personal Space:** Here are trusted friendships where more of one's true self is shared, and absences don't harm the bonds made. Here you will find comfort in vulnerability and mutual understanding, but not total exposure. You can experience this at a dinner table, living room, or coffee shop. Practicing hospitality here means opening your home and your busy schedule. This is something that will happen organically and cannot be programmed.

- **Intimate Space:** Here is the most exclusive space, reserved for a few (often 1–3 people) where full transparency reigns. Examples of this are your spouse (or other family member) and a few close friends. Practicing hospitality here is less about meals and more about presence. It's the ministry of knowing someone's pain, of hearing another's confession, of inviting someone to walk closely with you.

Although these *spaces overlap* at some level, we must respect the fluid but legitimate relational boundaries present. We are all guilty of attempting to force community due to our misunderstanding of community. Instead of trying to program community we should focus on cultivating a *culture of communal awareness* where we can enjoy true community at every space.

An implication of this is that we cannot force intimacy in order to practice the *one anothers* in Scripture. Instead, we can allow hospitality to aid us in our experience of community with one another. The reason for this is that hospitality can be practiced in a crowded sanctuary as well as in a quiet corner with a close friend. Hospitality is ultimately about making space for others (physically and relationally) *across every dimension of belonging*. When we practice hospitality in

public, social, personal, and intimate spaces, it becomes a way of life.

Welcome Home

In this last section, I want to focus your attention on the practice of hospitality in the context of your own home. The reason for this is that the home can function as the *glue for all of the relational spaces*. The home can be the key to help unlock a *culture of hospitality* in the local church.

Consider the following question Rosaria Butterfield asks: “Have you ever thought that you, your house, and your time are not your own but rather God’s ordained way of escape for someone?”⁴ This reminds us that we are not our own and that we truly don’t own anything. Our home can therefore serve as a safe haven for others. You can use “your” household to bless God’s household as a way of escape.

Add *food* to this escape plan and you will experience a beautiful picture of the gospel displayed through hospitality. Why? Because food serves as a constant reminder of our need, our hunger, our mortality, and even our need for company. You can eat alone and enjoy it, but there

⁴Butterfield, 110.

is greater enjoyment of food when accompanied by others. Tim Chester writes that “meals express inclusion”⁵ and “meals force you to be people oriented instead of task oriented.”⁶

Food can be one of your greatest tools in practicing hospitality. In fact, the phrase “breaking bread from house to house” in Acts 2:46 serves as a vivid snapshot of the early Christian community's rhythm in Jerusalem. It illustrates for us a balanced blend of organized public worship (v.42) and organic private fellowship around food.

Since food is involved, hospitality can be *messy*. It will require time and patience. Chester reminds us that:

Hospitality will lead to ‘collateral damage.’ Food will be spilled on your carpet. You’ll be left with clearing up. Your pantry may be decimated. But remember that God is welcoming you into his home through the blood of his own Son. The hospitality of God embodied in the table fellowship of

⁵Tim Chester, *A Meal with Jesus: Discovering Grace, Community, & Mission around the Table* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 44.

⁶Chester, 47.

Jesus is a celebration and sign of his grace and generosity. And we're to imitate that generosity.⁷

Hospitality in the home is *hard* work but it is *worth* the work.

You will grow in your *home-spitality* through trial and error. Prioritize it and prepare for it. Use a calendar, sign-up sheet, excel sheet, or whatever you need to schedule hosting people in your home. The reality is that you can meet up with people just about anywhere, but nothing compares to inviting someone into the intimacy of your home.

Take the *initiative* to host people you met and interacted with in all of the other communal spaces. This way you will get to know more people in your church. Hosting people is a very practical way of growing in welcoming people into your life. Even though you will not get to know everyone at a personal or intimate level (which is relationally impossible), you can still demonstrate genuine love to the brethren by welcoming them into your home. Promote hospitality out of love for your church and as a witness to the watching world.

⁷Ibid., 49.

Conclusion

Hospitality is the posture and act of welcoming others into our lives. Who are those “others?”

Strangers, neighbors, ministers, and the brethren.

Take time to consider how you can practice hospitality towards them in all of the community spaces God has providentially placed you in.

Embrace the whole hospitality spectrum and use whatever you call home as your base of operations.

Remember to welcome others in the name of Christ by the Spirit of God to the glory of God.

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