

SHARE GOD'S WELCOME

"Hospitality is the way we come out of ourselves. It is the first step toward dismantling the barriers of the world. Hospitality is the way to turn a prejudiced world around, one heart at a time."

— St. Benedict

In the days before cell phones and weather apps, we found ourselves driving a moving van as a white-out blizzard roared around us in icy madness. Gas was running low because our slow pace meant the trip was far longer than expected. The two toddlers felt secure and warm, but my dad and I knew the window of safety was closing as ice built up on the road.

So we prayed as Dad pulled the truck to the side of the road to flag down assistance. We were desperate for help and hospitality. That night, hospitality came in the form of a four-wheel drive with winter tires and a welcoming driver who inexplicably knew the way to my aunt's house in a nearby town.



How many people around us are barely making it through wintry conditions of the heart? **How many are desperate for hospitality that reflects the welcome of our loving God?**

Hospitality is framed by the love described in 1 Corinthians 13 and saturated by the Fruit of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5. Hospitality as a spiritual practice is rooted in an acknowledgement that we have received more than we deserve — and **we want to share that welcoming grace with others.** Hospitality lives out the abundant and extravagant generosity of God. Hospitality is a sample of heaven and a foretaste of the wedding supper of the Lamb.

Hospitality is different from entertaining. Entertaining may at times play a role in showing hospitality. But entertaining is about providing amusement or enjoyment, while **hospitality is an invitation given to others so that they experience God** — his welcome, shelter, and presence. Entertaining sometimes mistakenly measures success on how good the hosts look at the end of the party, but hospitality has more to do with how loved the guests feel at the end of the gathering.

One way to discern whether we are pursuing hospitality is by checking who is welcomed at our door. Entertainment might only open the door to those we enjoy, while **true hospitality is open to all comers.** The uncomfortable, the unique, the different, the undeserving, the lowly, the simple, the proud, the ungrateful, the rejected, the unlovely, the hostile, the unbeliever. Hospitality welcomes strangers who will challenge us and enhance our lives in unexpected ways. The spiritual practice of heavenly hospitality reflects the heart of God. **The gospel has wide-open arms. Do we?**

Having experienced God's welcome ...

- **We are constrained to pursue Romans 12:13:** *Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.*
- **We prioritize 1 Peter 4:9:** *Show hospitality to one another without grumbling.*
- **We anticipate Hebrews 13:2:** *Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.*

We can involve our children in the delight of sharing God's welcome with others. The thing that will sustain and give life to children is a sense of how God actually feels about them — his open arms to embrace them, ready forever to forget all their sins as though they had never happened. Then as they share hospitality with others, they are reminded of God's welcoming love toward them.

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INVITATIONS TO ENGAGE

Start the conversation with your child!

“Come and sit with me a minute. Let’s talk about how it feels to be welcomed, and how we can share that welcome with others.”

EARLY CHILDHOOD (2-6 years old)

Very soon, we are going to share a meal with another family in our neighborhood. When they come to our home, we want them to feel welcome right away. **Let’s ask God to give us some ideas of things we can say and do that will help them have a happy time with us.** *(Pause to ask God for wisdom.)*

What are some welcoming ways to greet them when they first come? Let’s practice making them feel welcome. Which of your toys will you be willing to share with the children who are coming? Let’s put a card on the table with each person’s name on it to show them that there is a special place for each of them to sit while we eat together. You can decorate the place cards however you choose.

What can we say or do as they leave that will make them feel God’s love? Let’s practice making them feel welcome even as they leave.

ELEMENTARY AGE (5-10 years old)

Let’s plan a friendship tea party (or a hot chocolate party), and invite two people we know really well. **Then let’s also invite two people we have never spent time with before.** Maybe these new people have never enjoyed a tea party before.

We can have our friendship party at the park, or in our backyard, or even online. You can design an invitation for us to mail, and we will put a tea bag (or cocoa packet) inside. While we are together, we can make pretty (or silly) hats out of paper plates and ribbon and play some games to celebrate new friendships!

Let’s read 1 Peter 4:9 together: *Show hospitality to one another.* **Now, let’s ask God who he would want us to share hospitality with, who he wants us to show his love to.**

PRETEEN/EARLY ADOLESCENT (10-14 years old)

First, let’s read Romans 12:13 together slowly a couple of times. *“Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.”*

Now let’s ask God to help us think of some people he wants to be part of a friendship project with us. *(Pause to pray and listen to God.)* **Let’s welcome some new friends — and some close friends — to join in this effort.**

We will get together and make a flower garden in a small planter box (with real flowers or with flowers from colored paper). When it’s finished, we will share the garden with someone who is lonely or ill or neglected. *(This friendship garden project can also be done online if everyone gathers their supplies and works together at the same time virtually.)*

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Mama Panya’s Pancakes, by Mary Chamberlin

Barney Wigglesworth and the Church Flood: A Book About Hospitality (Little Epistles for Kids), by Elspeth Campbell Murphy