

A Study of Biblical Hospitality

Just Open *The* Door

BIBLE STUDY



(in)courage author

JEN SCHMIDT

LifeWay Press® Nashville, Tennessee

Published by LifeWay Press® • ©2018 DaySpring Cards, Inc.

No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system, except as may be expressly permitted in writing by the publisher. Requests for permission should be addressed in writing to LifeWay Press®; One LifeWay Plaza; Nashville, TN 37234.

ISBN 978-1-4627-7988-8

Item 005799554

Dewey decimal classification: 248.6

Subject heading: ENTERTAINING \ JESUS CHRIST--SERVANTHOOD \ STEWARDSHIP

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the Christian Standard Bible®, Copyright © 2017 by Holman Bible Publishers®. Used by permission. Christian Standard Bible® and CSB® are federally registered trademarks of Holman Bible Publishers. Scripture quotations marked NIV are from THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®, NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide. Scriptures marked ESV are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Scriptures marked NASB are taken from the New American Standard Bible® (NASB), Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. www.lockman.org. Scriptures marked NLT are taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation (NLT), copyright © 1996, 2004, 2007, 2013, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, IL 60188. All rights reserved. Scriptures marked MSG are taken from THE MESSAGE (MSG). Copyright © by Eugene H. Peterson 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress. All rights reserved. Represented by Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

To order additional copies of this resource, write LifeWay Church Resources Customer Service; One LifeWay Plaza; Nashville, TN 37234; FAX order to 615.251.5933; call toll-free 800.458.2772; email orderentry@lifeway.com; order online at www.lifeway.com; or visit the LifeWay Christian Store serving you.

Printed in the United States of America

Adult Ministry Publishing, LifeWay Church Resources, One LifeWay Plaza, Nashville, TN 37234

Author is represented by Alive Literary Agency, 7680 Goddard Street, Suite 200, Colorado Springs, CO 80920, www.aliveliterary.com.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABOUT THE AUTHOR	5
INTRODUCTION	
Welcome	6
Viewer Guide: Session 1	8
WEEK 1	
Why Hospitality?.....	11
Viewer Guide: Session 2	32
WEEK 2	
Jesus as the Model.....	35
Viewer Guide: Session 3	56
WEEK 3	
The Power of One.....	59
Viewer Guide: Session 4	82
WEEK 4	
When Hospitality Is a Challenge.....	85
Viewer Guide: Session 5	104
WEEK 5	
At the Table	107
Viewer Guide: Session 6	128
WEEK 6	
The Uncomfortable Yes.....	131
Viewer Guide: Session 7	150
LEADER GUIDE	152
ENDNOTES	156

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



JEN SCHMIDT

For the last decade, Jen Schmidt has been encouraging, challenging, and cheering on women to embrace both the beauty and bedlam of their everyday lives on her popular lifestyle blog, *Balancing Beauty and Bedlam*.

With a myriad of topics from easy dinner ideas and personal finance to leaving a godly legacy, Jen equips others to live life to its fullest, reminding them it's the little things that really are the big things in life.

A popular speaker, worship leader, and founder/host of the annual Becoming Conference, Jen shares with humor and authenticity as she invites others to join her on this bumpy, beautiful life journey.

She lives in North Carolina with her husband, five children, a few too many animals, and an available sofa for anyone who needs it. For free resources, speaking inquiries, and ideas for all things heart and home, connect with Jen at www.beautyandbedlam.com or [@beautyandbedlam](https://twitter.com/beautyandbedlam).

(in)courage

FIND YOURSELF AMONG FRIENDS

At (in)courage you are welcome to a place of faith, connection, and friendship, where you will always find yourself among friends. Founded in 2009 by DaySpring, the Christian products subsidiary of Hallmark Cards, Inc., the vision for (in)courage was to create a new home for the hearts of women—where women take turns pulling up a chair to share their stories of what Jesus looks like in their everyday, gloriously ordinary, and often messy lives. Since then, (in)courage has grown into a vibrant community that reaches thousands of women every day, welcoming them just the way they are, offering a space to breathe, loving support, and resources for meaningful connection.

WELCOME!

Welcome, my sweet friend! It's such an honor to have you share these upcoming weeks with me. I'm so excited for all that we're going to learn together that I can hardly stand it. My only regret is that we can't all smooch around my kitchen table in real life and experience it face to face. I'm typing from that very spot, and my empty seats are begging to be filled by you. I'd keep the coffee brewing strong, while we'd crack open our Bibles together and pore over the truth of what God's Word reveals about the heart of hospitality.

Wouldn't that be wonderful? There's nothing I'd love more than to welcome you into our home and listen to a bit of your story. I'd want to know if you're a mountain or beach, coffee or tea, book or movie kind of friend. Then once we got those simple details out of the way, I'd want to peel back your history, hear firsthand what emotions and perceptions the word *hospitality* evokes in your mind, and catch a glimpse of your precious heart. Unfortunately, all that "in real life" goodness must wait. And it's OK. I can wait, because I know that one day it will happen. It's been promised since the very beginning, and what a day of celebration that will be.

As Christ followers, one day we will feast together in the kingdom of God, encountering hospitality like we could never imagine, but for now, the hospitality we extend and receive on earth is the next best thing.

My goal for the next seven weeks is that you will release your preconceived notions of what hospitality looks like. Throw out your magazines, cast aside apprehensions about your gifting, personality type, or meal-making abilities, and let's look at how the theology of everyday hospitality is intricately woven throughout the entirety of Scripture.

For you, this Bible study may be an invitation to an entirely new way of thinking about hospitality. Or it may be a refresher on what matters most, marked by a new and abiding passion that what you're doing is kingdom work. Either way, you and I will be doing some heart business over these next few weeks, and I pray it revolutionizes your thought process as it did mine.

My prayer is that we'll reframe our picture of hospitality and discover how God uses simple steps of faithfulness to ignite life change. So I'm inviting you to soul-satisfying work that will continue long after these pages are finished.

My goal is to awaken our souls to the transforming power of what open-door living can do in and through the lives of people who step forward and decide, "I'm willing and available." That declaration changes everything.

I want you to be able to look back in one year, five years, and even twenty-five years and glimpse the legacy of hospitality you've lived—the doors you've opened, the chairs you've pulled up to ensure everyone has a seat, the tables extended so that anyone, from anywhere, knows they're welcome at your table. I'm already getting excited, because I know what awaits. You hold the key that unlocks the door to so many meaningful possibilities, and I can't wait to discover them with you. I guarantee it will be worth it.

And I promise, all you have to do is just open the door.



VIEWER GUIDE: SESSION 1



Watch the Session 1 video and discuss with your group the following questions:

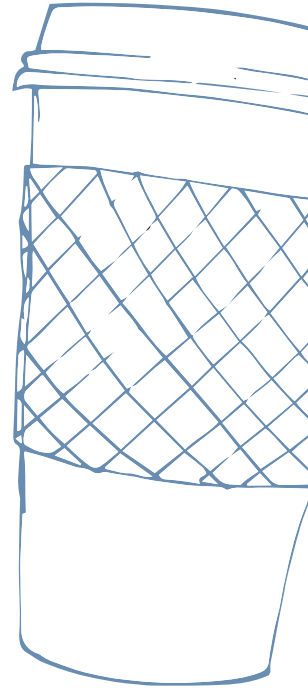
1. Take a moment to introduce yourself to the women in the group. Briefly share your thoughts on hospitality. Does it come easily for you, or has it been a struggle in the past?
2. When you read the Greatest Commandment in Matthew 22:36-40, what jumps out at you? Do you find this passage challenging? Or does it affirm that you're on the right track in your walk with Christ? Explain.
3. Do you see the way you love your neighbors as an opportunity to glorify God and show His greatness to others, while depending on His grace to love them well? Why or why not?
4. In her conversation with Jen, Angela Thomas-Pharr relays the story of a woman bringing bread to her home. What "bread" or small acts of kindness and hospitality can you offer those around you?
5. Have you "put life off," as Angela describes it, vowing to offer hospitality after a certain goal has been reached or home improvement has been made? What would need to change for you to be willing to open your heart to hospitality, even if that goal wasn't accomplished?



COME ON IN



WEEK 1: **WHY HOSPITALITY?**



We underestimate the life-changing impact that opening the doors of our hearts and homes to others has on our culture, because we overthink the notion of hospitality.

As I think back on where my legacy of hospitality started, my memories surround our childhood doorway. My favorite days growing up? The ones when the door announced action.

Slam. In. Slam. Out.

"In or out?" My mom's voice echoed through the house. "Please stop slamming the door." To me, though, that slam was never one of annoyance. Its recurring sound breathed life. It meant things were happening.

Dropping their mud-covered bikes on our grass, kids stormed through the door, hoping my brothers could play. *Slam.*

A neighbor lady popped her head in, asking for an extra egg. *Slam.*



A missionary family, spending the week with us while home on furlough, returned from an errand or a nearby speaking engagement. *Slam. Slam.*

But more than anything, I remember hearing the sound of that door on Sunday nights.

Long before *Field of Dreams* popularized the phrase, my parents had already personified the message, "If you build it, they will come."¹ Inspired by an outsized vision for impacting their community and a genuine love for others, they defied the indoor space limitations of our 1,500-square-foot house and poured a concrete pad in the backyard. Thus began an informal volleyball league meeting every Sunday night. Friends, kids, and strangers alike gathered from all over. Simple snacks lined the table, complete with stacks of coolers filled with cold drinks. Smoky aromas from a charcoal grill wafted through the air. Laughter mingled with the casual delights of shared conversation, punctuated by roars of cheering and applause for points scored and exceptional plays. High fives all around.

There was never anything fancy about it. But I'm telling you, a whole lot more than volleyball took place on those incredibly memorable evenings of my childhood. What started out as a loosely-connected community gathering for a game, turned into a group of friends, which lingered into lasting relationships. Life after life. Story after story.

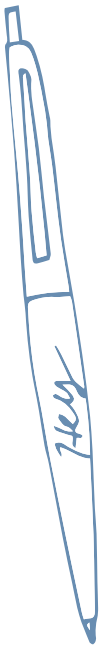
My parents—just an ordinary couple—made a deliberate decision, intent on getting to know the people around them from more than a polite distance. I didn't even realize they were modeling anything special. They were simply living the natural outflow of their faith, putting a smiling face on their hearts of welcome.

It changed the community dynamic. It changed people's lives. It changed my life. Because biblical hospitality has the power to do that. To change lives, to shift the culture, to impact a generation. But most importantly, hospitality offers us a simple yet radical and life-giving vehicle to welcome others and point them to the fullness of life in Christ.

This is a living, breathing, God-ordained path to walk out the abundance of the gospel in our everyday lives through simple acts of hospitality.

Some of you have never seen biblical hospitality modeled well, or you can't conceive why it's so important. You may think it's too late to start now, yet your heart desires to learn more. The exciting news is that your new legacy can begin today. You can begin writing your own open door story right now.

I genuinely believe that lives will be changed with something as simple as an invitation.



DAY 1

The Beginning

"Let's start at the very beginning, it's a very good place to start."² I've been humming that musical tune all day, and my mind can't help but leap to the beginning when it comes to understanding the biblical framework for hospitality.

I understand that asking you to set aside years of assumptions on the topic is easier said than done, and I certainly don't want you to forget them; they're part of what shapes your story. The fullness of God's work in our lives is represented by varying personal experiences. When we come to the table with a mingling of backgrounds, nationalities, skin colors, and social, political, and economic differences, it's a vivid reflection of the kingdom of heaven.

Yet after talking with hundreds of women about hospitality, it's clearly a deeply personal and vulnerable act. Our preconceived notions and experiences do shape our views on the topic, which not only impacts how we live it out but also whether we engage and open our doors to others at all.

What preconceived notions and experiences shape your view of hospitality?

Disappointed or discouraged, refused or rejected. Too busy, too burdensome, too much work, too much worrying. Messy house, messy life. Can't cook, can't converse.

Do you find yourself in any of these descriptions? Which ones?

Or maybe you're at the other end of the spectrum: warm and welcoming, inviting, cozy, the more the merrier, open heart, open home.

Over the next seven weeks, we are going to reframe our ideas about hospitality. As we cast a new vision, this will be our opportunity to compare our thoughts from today to what they'll be at the very end of the study.



In school, my least favorite classes were the ones when I'd rush to get there on time, only to have the teacher tell me to take out my pen and paper for a quick quiz. I don't mean to be one of those teachers, but I'm asking you to do the same.

When I hear the word *hospitality*, I think it means:

Please don't write what you think is the correct Bible answer. I'd like you to be honest about this, since no one is going to read over your shoulder unless you want them to.

When I think of inviting others into my home, I feel:

Write down three things you hope your home will be for the people who live there as well as the ones who come over to visit:

As a result of this study, I want my understanding of hospitality to:

In *The Sound of Music*, when Maria taught the children to sing by using the building blocks of Do-Re-Mi, she desired that the children experience the fullness of joy that music would bring them. As they learned the fundamentals, they could compose, create, harmonize, and enjoy a richness they never knew before.

The same rings true for hospitality. As we lay a solid theological foundation and you uncover the depth of hospitality that saturates the pages of Scripture, you won't believe the fullness that accompanies walking a road of welcome. So I officially welcome you to Week 1, not just for our time together, but for laying our first cornerstone. All solid foundations take time, so stick with me because it will be worth it.



The very beginning: Genesis 1:1. You may even know it by memory. How does it all start? Look up the passage, and write Genesis 1:1.

In the very beginning, the Creator, the Sustainer, the Alpha and Omega, offered the first act of hospitality as He welcomed us in His very first week of creation.

After the heavens and earth came into being, each day He continued to create a home for us. With order, beauty, and balance, He hung the moon, the stars, and the sun. He separated the waters from the sky. His detailed designs manifest themselves throughout millions of species of vegetation and living creatures. When He saw it all, He declared it good.

I've read those first verses so many times that sometimes my eyes quickly glance over the intricacies of His creation instead of remembering anew the elaborate masterpiece He created for us to enjoy. They all point to His glory, His power, His majesty, and His goodness.

Rarely a sunset occurs that shouldn't be accompanied by the sky writing, "The heavens declare the glory of God" (Ps. 19:1). His creative expression manifested in perfection.

Yes, God demonstrated His hospitable nature as He welcomed humanity home to live in the beauty of the garden with Him, and then He provided everything they needed.

The LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he placed the man he had formed. The LORD God caused to grow out of the ground every tree pleasing in appearance and good for food, including the tree of life in the middle of the garden, as well as the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

GENESIS 2:8-9

Yet knowing what I know now, I'm often stumped as to His choice in Genesis 1:26-27 to make creatures "in his own image." If needed, read Genesis 3 to refresh your memory.

Everything was so good. Why didn't He hang up His paintbrush right before the creation of mankind? He could have finished with perfection, so why continue when He knew what was about to happen? The separation and sin that was about to occur?

Why do you think God created humans, knowing what would happen? Look at Isaiah 43:7 for a hint.

Then with the fullness of His “everlasting love” (Jer. 31:3) for us, God served as the first gracious host as He welcomed humanity to earth for His glory.

When the Holy Spirit opened my eyes to this underlying theme of the hospitality of God, something shifted in my spirit. Having been conditioned to think of hospitality in entertaining terms, the premise that God’s perfect character demonstrated ongoing hospitality has revolutionized how I prioritized it.

Think this through. The first invitation began at the beginning of time when God welcomed us to experience perfect life with Him in the garden. It continues to thread through nearly every chapter from Genesis to Revelation. (You’ll see this unfold more in later study weeks.) Then it culminates with His final divine act of generous hospitality: the marriage feast.

I yearn for that day when those who trust in Christ will gather at His table in the most glorious act of celebration. Our sin will be no more, and we will sit with God in complete fellowship with Him. (And since it will be the perfect kind of gathering, I’m fairly certain He’ll provide chips, queso, and guacamole for me. What will you have?) Yes, God chooses to display His glory, His character, and His everlasting love with sweeping gestures of hospitality, so shouldn’t welcoming others be near to our hearts as well?

God’s hospitality is dynamic and active. He pursues and welcomes. He rescues and renews. He calls and knocks, but He won’t force His hospitality. It’s freely given.

From our beginning to our end, He knows our deepest longings and invites us into perfect fellowship with Him, if we will just open the door. He knocks. He first initiates, but then the tables turn, and He becomes a patient guest waiting to be welcomed in.

Read and record Revelation 3:20.

It all points to that invitation, doesn’t it? And when you accept that invite, let’s get the party started!

DAY TWO

The Heart of God

See! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.

REVELATION 3:20

When we brainstormed the title for this book, I'll admit that this verse initially didn't cross my mind. Perhaps your first assumption gravitated to literal doors, because when you read the words *hospitality* and *door* on the same book cover, what else would you think?

Any entertaining expert would encourage us to put our best feet forward to make a good first impression, and that begins with our door, the gateway to our home.

Clear the clutter from the front porch. *Check.*

Hang a beautiful wreath. *Check.*

Arrange the entryway so it's warm and inviting. *Check.*

As we read yesterday about the orderly account of creation, we know God is in the smallest of details and created beauty for us to enjoy, but His primary focus has always been on the condition of our hearts.

Humans do not see what the LORD sees, for humans see what is visible,
but the LORD sees the heart.

1 SAMUEL 16:7b

As I became more intimately acquainted with the Scripture that explores the heart of hospitality, I expanded my thought process to include *door* as a metaphor.

"Just open the door" doesn't always mean our personal home. If we're going to understand the full heart of the gospel, we must begin by asking the Lord to open the doors of our hearts and soften them to the needs around us. He wants to do this for us. He's opened my eyes in new ways. He's perked my ears to conversations that I typically stroll by, and He's revealing powerful stories simply because I'm slowing down enough to open the door wherever I am.



He's reminded me that every encounter matters to Him, no matter how small it might appear. And let me tell you, when I pray and plead that He'll soften my heart to reveal needs around me, He does it all right—every single time. It's up to me how I'll respond to them.

So when we landed on this title, I sensed Him reminding me of its primary importance through Revelation 3:20. *Jen, this is what it's all about. If they'd just open the door to Me, they'll experience a joy and fullness of life that they never knew existed.* In a surprising role reversal, God, who began as the first host, now awaits the most important invitation of all.

Can a simple invitation really change lives? Oh yes! We open the doors of our hearts and invite Him to be Lord of our lives which then compels us to open the doors of our homes so we can point others to Him. Continuously, we see that modeled in Scripture.

Beginning in the Old Testament, God tells His people to welcome and love the stranger. Within the context of that ancient culture, He instructed them to give of their time, energy, and whatever meager possessions were on hand, demonstrating hospitality to traveling strangers by feeding and housing them after an exhausting journey.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE	WHO OFFERED HOSPITALITY? TO WHOM?	WHAT DID THEY DO FOR THEIR GUEST?
Genesis 18:1-8		
Genesis 24:31		
Leviticus 23:22		
2 Samuel 17:27-29		
1 Kings 17:10-15		

What theme are you sensing?

How can we practically apply these verses to our lives today?

Did you know that the necessity of hospitality was actually part of their Mosaic Law? Yes, it was the law! Yikes! When I look at how our generation has become increasingly more individualistic and isolated creatures of comfort, I've asked myself, *How much trouble would I have been in back then?*

It was not only the host's expectation to house, offer food, wash their feet, and keep guests from harm; it was an obligation. And these acts were always reciprocal in nature. Considered a breach of honor if either the host or the guest refused, strangers were welcomed as guests and might leave as friends. Communities lived interconnected, and their safety and survival depended on the kindness of strangers.

Hospitality in the ancient world focused on the alien or stranger in need. The plight of aliens was desperate. They lacked membership in the community, be it tribe, city-state, or nation. As an alienated person, the traveler often needed immediate food and lodging. Widows, orphans, the poor, or sojourners from other lands lacked the familial or community status that provided a landed inheritance, the means of making a living, and protection. In the ancient world the practice of hospitality meant graciously receiving an alienated person into one's land, home, or community and providing directly for that person's needs.³

The kindness of strangers—it can be a lifeline when we most need it, can't it? One that doesn't need to be reserved for our Old Testament history class or a highlight on the nightly news.

Can you think back on a time when you've been the stranger, the new girl at work, or the uninvited guest who waited on the fringes for a word of welcome? Tell about that experience. Has it impacted how you reach out to others?



Mine was very unconventional, but never have I needed a lifeline so desperately as when I was a college student traveling by myself through Europe. On my way to Bible school with my travel plans derailed, I stood alone in a London train station, wondering where I could lay my head for the next two evenings. Pulling out my list of approved youth hostels, I balanced the dial-up phone (yes, it was a few years ago), my coin purse (back when we needed to insert them every few minutes), and all the adventurous spirit I could muster. Always one to see the glass half full, I made my first call. No answer. *No problem. Lots more options await.* On to the second call. Sorry, no room. *No worries, there are six more to go.*

Painstakingly, I made my way down the list, but call after call ended with no availability. Ten o'clock at night, jet-lagged, travel weary, and a stranger in a foreign land, I flipped to the last listed number as my prior "conquer the world" nerves began crumbling.

An older woman answered. I requested a space, any space, and when she replied that they too were full, I did what any self-respecting girl might do. I begged. I pleaded. I told her I didn't care if I slept on the floor, but I was alone, I had no idea where I was, and I didn't have a place to stay.

"Please, can you help me?"

Friend, it was complete and utter desperation.

"We are completely full," the owner replied, "but I guess if you don't mind sharing a bed with Mary, she would be OK with it."

Share a bed with Mary? I didn't know Mary, but I felt an immediate kinship with her, because I'm fairly certain that when Jesus' mother's only choice was to sleep near the animals, she wasn't about to complain.

"Yes, thank you. Thank you," I replied as a strong sense of peace washed over me. Decades later as I recall that story, those emotions still rush to the forefront of my memory, and I'm there in that phone booth once again.

Hailing the nearest taxi, I headed to the given address. As I was greeted by the very proper British proprietor, I lunged into her arms to show my appreciation—so American of me—and my next act still has me chuckling when I think back on this time. I climbed into bed with a complete stranger, better yet, a sleeping stranger. Now granted, sweet, elderly Mary was a retired missionary, and completely safe, or so I'm told, but yes, not only was I welcomed by a stranger, but I slept beside one too.

Recounting this story now, it sounds absolutely crazy. But I think it lines up perfectly with God's plan for offering hospitality to strangers in need, and I guarantee, I was in need.

All these years later, I can't picture the face of the woman who showed me such kindness, but I'm still grateful for her gift of an invitation when I needed it most. It felt radical to this overwhelmed traveler who desperately yearned for someone to offer grace and a simple welcome.

Have you had a similar experience of welcome? Tell about how you were made to feel at home.

This experience marked me in such a profound way that my heart for the stranger, the lonely girl, the one waiting on the outskirts to be invited in, has impacted my heart for gathering.

There's a reason God impressed the importance of showing love to strangers throughout the Old Testament. We see it found in Leviticus 19 when God commanded Moses to tell the Israelites the following:

When an alien resides with you in your land, you must not oppress him. You will regard the alien who resides with you as the native-born among you. You are to love him as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt; I am the LORD your God.

LEVITICUS 19:33-34

Write these verses in your own words.

The Israelites were intimately acquainted with what it felt like to be strangers, foreigners, and hostages of their hosts. Once chained by the bondage of Egypt, they understood freedom and God's merciful rescue. And when they didn't have a home, God provided food and shelter as the Hebrew people wandered in the wilderness (Ex. 16–17).



God wanted the Israelites to remember their own desperate loneliness, their struggles, and their years in slavery, so they could empathize and create a safe space for others who needed to be welcomed. There was another reason that God called them to care for the foreigner. They were to model for all the surrounding nations what a relationship with God looked like and who God is. They were to show that God wanted to and would welcome the foreigner into a relationship with Him.

For the people of God in the Old Testament the duty of hospitality came right from the center of who God was. I am the Lord your God who made a home for you and brought you there with all my might and all my soul. Therefore, you shall love the stranger as yourself. You shall be holy as I am holy (Leviticus 19:1). Your values shall mirror my values.⁴

That's the cornerstone of why hospitality matters so much. It matters to the heart of God. It is foundational to His nature and to our theology of hospitality. This heart of the gospel that's rooted in a gift of invitation weaves its way throughout all of Scripture, and we've only touched the surface. When we welcome and invite others into community, it's because we're driven by an overarching principle: love God, love His will, and point others to His glory.

Since we've started at the very beginning, let's remember why we are here. Prior to our salvation, we too were strangers, foreigners, orphans to God, and separated because of our sin. Yet because of His hospitality extended to each of us, we are strangers no more. Jesus opened the door for us to have an everlasting, personal relationship with God.

So then you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with the saints, and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole building, being put together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you are also being built together for God's dwelling in the Spirit.

EPHESIANS 2:19-22

Take a moment to close in prayer, thanking God for His love and for welcoming you into His household. Ask for His guidance to extend the same to others.

DAY 3

Biblical Hospitality

I admit I throw the word *love* around much too liberally. As I write, I'm sitting with my candle burning, a fuzzy blanket covering my lap, and soft music playing in the background. I love it. The best part is my hot coffee in hand. I love my morning coffee. I also love French fries dipped in ranch dressing. I love a good book and a movie. I love watching our children enjoy spending time with each other. So many things I love. For me, it's birthed from my passion and zeal for life, but I don't want to become numb to the fullness and depth of its true, biblical meaning.

Nothing compares to the love that Jesus spoke about when challenged by one of the Pharisees,

"Teacher, which command in the law is the greatest?" He said to him, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and most important command. The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands."

MATTHEW 22:36-40

The word *love* used in these verses stems from the Greek *agape*. *Agape* is defined as "to esteem, love, indicating a direction of the will and finding one's joy in something or someone."⁵

What stands out to you about this definition of *love*?

With the fullness of the meaning fleshed out, let's look at the Greatest Commandment again. Everything good that His Spirit produces in our lives comes from a single-minded devotion to these two priorities: love God and love others. When we resolve to embrace an open-door lifestyle, the one word behind this motivation is simple too—love.

Love is our invitation to act, and our choices launch from this cornerstone. Note that Jesus didn't pause and ponder part two of His command. He didn't divide these two instructions into an either/or situation.



The way we love our neighbor reveals something about the way we love God. And the way we love God reveals something about the way we love our neighbor.

I have loved you with an everlasting love;
I have drawn you with unfailing kindness.

JEREMIAH 31:3, NIV

We are to pour into others with that kind of love and kindness. I want my love for God and His love for me to spill out to those around me in such a tangible way that they can't help but wonder what makes me different.

Don't you want the same? Don't you want to be known as someone who lives Life with a capital L, fully alive in Him and loving others so thoroughly because you have no doubt from where that *agape* love stems?

Does that reflect you now? Why or why not?

Can you think of someone who lives fully alive like that? Share about her.

I refreshed our memories with the Greatest Commandment, because somewhere along the way we've made loving others more difficult than intended. We've forgotten that opening our hearts and homes to others, and loving our neighbors as ourselves, has nothing to do with our entertaining skills; it's all about showcasing the love, grace, and mercy of our Lord.

Look up 1 John 4:19, and write out exactly why it is that we love.

Paul reminded us that it's about sharing our lives.

Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well.

1 THESSALONIANS 2:8, NIV

One of the easiest ways to show love is to invite others into community with us: to practice hospitality.

In the New Testament, we find the difference between a friendly and generous reception (the dictionary definition) and what we are called to practice in biblical hospitality.

Read Romans 15:7. What is a primary motive found here for hospitality?

Different translations offer varying verbs in this verse: “welcome” (ESV), “receive” (KJV), “accept” (CSB), but each of these end with for “the glory of God.”

The Greek root expands on *agape’s* meaning even further:

To take to oneself, i.e., use (food), lead (aside), admit (to friendship or hospitality): to take or receive into one’s home, with the collateral idea of kindness.⁶

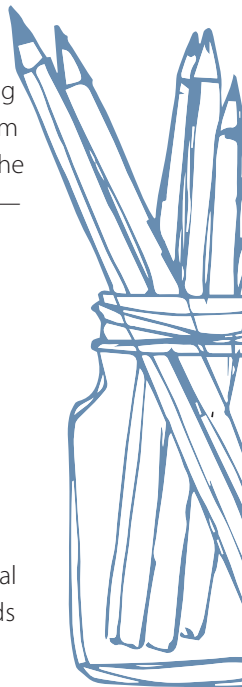
This is our motive for living a life of welcome, yet sometimes we allow social entertaining to hijack the heart of biblical hospitality. When I’m stressed and overthink why I invite, I’m reminded that we have no grand blueprint for hospitality aside from loving others. As the master architect, God drew up hospitality so that it’s anchored to this core component—loving Him and loving others.

Among the most direct, concise biblical statements on this subject is what Paul says in Romans.

Pursue hospitality.

ROMANS 12:13b

It’s not a question. In fact, *pursue* is a strong verb that implies constant or continuous action, a proactive decision. When you break down the word *hospitality* from the original Greek word *philoxenia*, it’s a combination of two concepts. *Philos* is one of several words



for “loving,” while *xenos* means “a stranger.”⁷ The concept behind hospitality has its origin, literally, in love for outsiders.

Don’t neglect to show hospitality, for by doing this some have welcomed angels as guests without knowing it.

HEBREWS 13:2

Yet somehow, there’s a misnomer that these verses only apply to those who have the “gift of hospitality.” Many assume it’s an optional, bonus suggestion for those who love having people in their homes and throwing parties, but nowhere in Scripture does it suggest that some have the gift of hospitality while others lack it. Instead, we’re repeatedly told in Scripture that the Lord chooses to receive and multiply the smallest offerings we have to give.

He didn’t first clarify the challenge to welcome with a list of expectations. Nowhere can I find in the Bible, “Pursue hospitality, but not until you’ve mastered ten tips for hosting a beautifully organized dinner party.” We aren’t given any qualifications about our personality types, the size of our homes, or the ingredients necessary for a culinary delight.

There’s such freedom in that, isn’t there?

While some may like creating lovely tablescapes more than others, that has nothing to do with the heart of hospitality. Every single one of us is meant to be in the habit of pursuing hospitality—opening our doors to love those around us. Grammar gurus will notice that it’s an imperative sentence: a command. Yes, it’s both a calling and a command to love others well in a tangible way by continually pursuing hospitality.

To further clarify, let’s look at the differences between entertaining and biblical hospitality.

In her book *Entertaining*, Martha Stewart says,

Entertaining, like cooking, is a little selfish, because it really involves pleasing yourself, with a guest list that will coalesce into your ideal of harmony, with a menu orchestrated to your home and taste and budget, with decorations subject to your own eye. Given these considerations, it has to be pleasurable.⁸

This one paragraph hints at the telltale difference between the two. It all rests on this dichotomy.

The entertaining host seeks to elevate herself for personal approval. And as Martha mentions, it's a bit selfish. When the guest arrives, the entertainer internally announces, *Here I am. Come into my beautiful abode and have the honor of partaking of all the wonderful things I've spent hours getting done for you. Look at this lavish buffet, the intricate décor, and the wonderful party favors. How fortunate for you to be here and be part of this.*

While I embellish on what a hostess might actually say, we've all encountered this once or twice, haven't we? Maybe we've even allowed a similar tone to slip ever so subtly into our own hosting.

Friend, I can tell you right now, this will be one of the greatest areas of tensions experienced as we make opening our door a regular rhythm of everyday life. Why should this surprise us? Once again, it stems from the very beginning with Eve's temptation in the garden to want more, to be more impressive—it stems from our pride.

Satan is crafty. Why should he switch up his strategy now when it's worked so well since the first place people called home?

However, biblical hospitality is different. It's not about us. Opening our doors has nothing to do with the actual setting, the guest list, or the food. The atmosphere can be exactly the same with very different results based on the heart attitude of the one who welcomes.

While we may use our love of beauty and creativity to pamper our guests if we choose, the goal is to reflect the heart of God. Welcoming others as He Himself has welcomed us.

So where do we start? The verses below give us an idea of the character qualities that enable biblical hospitality.

Look up the following and write down how we are to welcome and treat others.
Romans 12:10

Ephesians 4:1-2

Colossians 3:12-13



Read Philippians 2:3-5. How do these verses tell us to act? Who is the model or standard for our actions?

Biblical hospitality offers our best to Him first, understanding that our best to others will then fall into place. It transforms our selfish motives and elevates our guests. When the hospitable hostess swings wide the door, all her attention focuses outward while expressing, *There you are. I've been waiting for you. There's no one more important today than you, and I'm thrilled you're here.* The posture we assume in hospitality is one that bends low, generously offering our hearts to another despite whatever interruption to our own plans or comfort. Extending hospitality is about freely giving of ourselves while granting others the freedom to be themselves. Shifting our focus from us to them removes all unnecessary expectations. No need to worry about what to say or how to act. Just come as you are because our approval is only for Him.

Hospitality, unlike entertaining, treats everyone as guests of honor rather than grasping at honor for ourselves. It is servanthood, not status-seeking—"there you are," versus "here I am"—serving others instead of serving self.

The deep-seated worrying, the excuses, and the overthinking of a simple invitation should be warning signs, telling us we're confusing social entertaining with hospitality.

When we realign ourselves with the ultimate purpose of hospitality, the blessing comes in the difference. For as we obey what God commands here—as we begin to experience the fullness, richness, and joy that comes from practicing life-giving hospitality—we see this biblical instruction transforming from an active command to a deep, profound, yet simple calling, one that we pursue first out of love, only to find it too contagious for us to stop.

When we use our lives exactly as they are, desiring only to create a sacred space for our guests, mixing it with the countercultural truth of loving Jesus and loving others, we turn entertaining upside-down, and it becomes radical hospitality.

To know Him and make Him known. All for His glory.



HOSPITALITY INVITATION

Generating a legacy of welcome begins with one small step of faithfulness at a time, so each week, I will invite you to join me in a simple challenge.

I've often dubbed myself as the "Queen of Best Intentions," meaning I want to be intentional with my choices, but I don't always follow through. These challenges are meant as an encouragement to close the loop on best intentions and make them a reality.

We've already looked at the Greatest Commandment: loving God and loving our neighbor as ourselves. But today we are going to rethink it in terms of proximity, in terms of our actual, literal neighbors. Begin with the ones who live next door, those people with whom we're too embarrassed to initiate conversation because we can't remember their names. Or how about the couple who recently moved in across the street, the ones we've avoided ever since our trash can rolled into their yard and they got upset about the mess? Maybe it's the neighbor who shares the apartment wall, whose loud noise brings constant annoyance.

Simple steps can change the way we do community with those who live in closest proximity to us. Little decisions can reveal the great needs waiting out there, crying to be met, as we open our literal doors. To befriend. To be a light in the darkness.

What does it mean to really love our neighbors? Not with an agenda. Not as a project to check off our to-do lists. This is about cultivating an authentic relationship with people we live (and work) closest to and then letting God do whatever He desires to do with it from there.

My fear is that we've sort of generalized this concept of neighbor, to the point where we miss the specificity of the command and don't even apply it to those people who are our most obvious neighbors, the ones we most often see in passing. That's why I'm issuing a call to begin putting this principle into practice right where we live, work, or volunteer.

As I think through how to love them well, I first imagine ways in which I want to be loved. Encouraging words or simple acts of service are always great beginnings to any neighboring relationship.



PLUS ONE

This week it's about adding a "Plus One." No, we're not looking for a future husband or a date for a wedding, but we will seek to add one new conversation, one new act of kindness, or one new opportunity to connect in a more meaningful way with someone outside our normal interactions.

Let's ask ourselves a few questions as a starting place. Remember to turn your grace on and your guilt off. We are starting our new legacy of hospitality today, and I can't wait to see how your answers change over the next few weeks.

Think of the eight closest apartments, homes, or work cubicles/offices. Jot down the names, occupations, or any personal information you know about the lives of those who live or work there.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.

How did you do?

Statistically, more than half of us don't even know our neighbors' names, let alone have a relationship with them. And even among those who do know their neighbors a little, who talk to them once in a while, nearly all of them (when asked) say they've never had any

meaningful interaction with a neighbor. It's almost nonexistent. As Christ followers, we must do better.

This week, pick one person from your Plus One list to initiate some kind of new conversation, interaction, or if you're ready, invitation.

To get the ideas going, how about starting with the neighbor whose name slips your mind? This week make it your priority to watch for a time to connect with her. Take the first step and bridge the disconnect. If it's been months since you've talked, humble yourself, and say something like, "I'm so sorry that I haven't taken the time to get to know you more. I want to change that. I'm so embarrassed, but please remind me of your name again. I'm Jen." Leading with honesty and vulnerability serves as a bridge builder. If you have extra burgers on the grill and see them in the yard, sometimes a spontaneous invitation works wonderfully and eliminates prior pressure to go crazy cleaning.

Do you pass someone in your work cafeteria every day but have never asked them a personal question? Maybe today is your day. I'm not suggesting any kind of church-related conversation either. I'm encouraging a "Hey, I'm so glad it's Friday, aren't you? Do you have any fun plans?" Casual. It starts there.

From your Plus One list, identify one thing you could do every day, by word or action, that builds the relationship with no ulterior motives except glorifying God through one simple relationship builder.

Remember, Plus One. I can't wait for you to see what happens when you incorporate one small step of intentionality.



VIEWER GUIDE: SESSION 2



Watch the Session 2 video and discuss with your group the following questions:

1. How might you “cultivate a spirit of welcome” in your home with guests, friends, and family?
2. Jen said, “Whenever you apologize for your messy house or your chaos, it still makes it about you. Stop apologizing because it doesn’t point others to Him; it points to yourself.” Have you ever thought about that before? Do you agree or disagree? Why?
3. How was hospitality modeled for you in your home of origin? What from that experience do you hope to emulate in your home as an adult? What might you like to do differently?
4. What does the statement “our legacy starts today” mean to you? Does it bring you comfort or anxiety? Why?
5. In your life, what might it look like to, as Donna said, “Live on purpose in telling the truth”?
6. Do you rely on other people to extend hospitality to you before you reach out to them? Do you struggle to “go first” in relationships? Why might that be a temptation?
7. Jen says, “Adoption is the heartbeat of the gospel.” How might you be a part of God’s plan of adoption in the world? Consider ways to help through adoption of children, discipleship (helping usher people into God’s family), or supporting foster and adoptive families.

