

AUGUST 2022

Practice of the Month

HOSPITALITY

"Turning strangers into
neighbors and neighbors
into family."

Rosaria Butterfield



WHAT IS HOSPITALITY?

The act of creating a safe, open space where a friend or stranger can enter and experience the welcoming spirit of Christ in another.

Hospitality is not about impressing others with well-decorated homes and gourmet cooking, and it certainly isn't just for the gifted or those with clean homes. Hospitality is a way of loving our neighbors in the same way God has loved us. In her book 'The Gospel Comes with a House Key', Rosaria Butterfield writes this...

"Radically ordinary hospitality – those who live it see strangers as neighbors and neighbors as family of God. They recoil at reducing a person to a category or a label. They see God's image reflected in the eyes of every human being on earth. Those who live out radically ordinary hospitality see their homes not as theirs at all, but as God's gift to use for the furtherance of his kingdom. They open doors; they seek out the underprivileged. They know that the gospel comes with a house key."

WHY PRACTICE IT?

The history of the church is around the table. For hundreds of years, this is where the people of Jesus met. The gospel spread from one table to the next. From one home to another. All over a meal. "They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people" (Acts 2:46-47).

As our world gets increasingly more polarizing and hostile, it desperately needs safe people and safe places. Hospitality is quite possibly the best way to be God's welcoming arms in a hostile world by inviting people into our most vulnerable place— our homes. By practicing hospitality, we incarnate the welcoming heart of God to our community and our world.





WHERE DO WE SEE JESUS ENGAGE IN IT?

It would be rather hard to read through the gospels and not notice how often Jesus sat and ate with people. He was constantly the recipient of hospitality or the one practicing it. Sometimes he ate with his disciples, sometimes with good friends, and other times with complete strangers. He did this so often that some of the pharisees accused him of being a glutton and drunkard (Luke 7:34). Unsurprisingly, these religious leaders completely missed the point of what Jesus was doing— he was seeking and saving the lost BY eating and drinking with them (Luke 19:10; Luke 7:34).

Jesus' style of seeking and saving the lost through a shared meal is the reason why New Testament writers like Peter and Paul stressed hospitality so much in their writing. In Romans, Paul didn't beat around the bush. He simply commanded them to “practice hospitality” (Romans 12:13). And by practice, he meant do it with intense effort and with a definite purpose or goal. That's how Paul wanted us to approach hospitality, with intentionality and purpose.

Peter says in his first letter to continue to love each other, and instructs them to do so by offering hospitality to one another (1 Peter 4:8-9). Not grudgingly, but cheerfully! The writer of Hebrews tells his readers the exact same thing— to keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters by showing hospitality to strangers (Hebrews 13:1-2).

The table seems like such an ordinary place. It's so routine and everyday that it's easily overlooked as a place of life changing community. Think about it... Jesus was on a divine mission to save humanity, and chose to use so much of his valuable time sharing meals with people around a table. That has to mean it's a significant place to be and share! By opening our homes, setting a table and sharing a meal, we provide the context for which people feel loved and where people feel heard; a place where God's spirit can move. The practice of hospitality is central to the Kingdom of God; Jesus ate with the lost, and he ate with his community.





REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- When have you been so deeply received that the welcome touched your heart?
- When have you been wounded because you were not welcomed and received?
- How has the welcome of Jesus touched your life and your wounds?
- How comfortable are you with being the host or hostess? How do you feel about having guests come to visit? Where do you struggle with doing everything perfectly?
- Who has modelled hospitality and welcome for you?
- How might Jesus want to use your heart and home as a shelter for others?

SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

- No need to over-think this one... invite people over! This could be people at Northridge, those in your small group, friends from work, or your neighbors. Anyone!
- Develop the practice of praying for the people you invite to your home. Pray for them as you invite them. Pray for them the day they come. Pray for them as they leave your driveway. How has sharing your home with them given you deeper ways to hold them before the Lord?
- Be spontaneous. Hold a "craving potluck." Ask everyone to bring something they crave. Don't try to make it perfect. Focus on the guests.
- Hospitality is not something we do all by ourselves; it invites others in. When you offer hospitality, let your guests help. If you have trouble letting people help you, make this a matter of prayer. What in you needs to be touched to make you receptive and open?
- Have a leftovers gathering. Invite people to bring what is in their refrigerator. See what kind of meal happens. Tell your guests the main point is just to be together!
- Help your children grow in understanding God's hospitable heart. Help them plan a party for their friends. Encourage them to think about what will make each one feel most welcome