

Worship Through Hospitality

Romans 12:1 & 13

I have entitled the message this morning “Worship Through Hospitality”. Hospitality is something that the Lord has been stirring in my heart, especially during this last year.

A few years ago, we were looking for ways to be more hospitable as a youth group. The student leaders began visiting other youth groups, by themselves, in order to better understand what it was like to be a visitor and to learn ways that we could be more hospitable. We adopted the motto, “We’re awkward so you don’t have to be”. The idea was that we were willing to do something difficult in the pursuit of making our guests more comfortable. This is generally where the passage is going to take us today.

Romans 12:13 says, ¹³ *Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.* We are going to focus on the last half of this verse and I would like to begin by defining hospitality. The Greek word for hospitality (philoxenia) literally means “friendliness shown to strangers”. It is to show love to strangers.

At the time this was written hospitality served a very practical purpose. Travel was much more difficult and dangerous. Many of the conveniences that we enjoy today were not available. Without Orbitz or Hotwire it wasn’t very easy to plan ahead. There was no Hilton or Best Western and the places that were available for lodging were typically sleazy, dirty, and ultimately unsafe. Hospitality addressed a significant need at this time for travelers who were vulnerable and in great need of shelter, nourishment, rest, and refreshment.

When the New Testament talks about hospitality, this is the context it is in and so the idea is primarily one of caring for travelers/strangers in your home. Providing for their needs. Ultimately showing friendliness and love to strangers!

While recognizing the context helps us define and understand biblical hospitality, we should be careful to not let it unnecessarily limit our application either. For example, we shouldn’t say that this command doesn’t apply to us since we live in a time of traveling convenience and there are very few strangers who would accept an invitation to stay in our home. We can’t even say that this doesn’t apply to us because we don’t have a home.

A couple years ago, while going through 1 Peter with the HS Students I quickly passed over the section regarding hospitality thinking it had very little relevant application to those who did not have homes. However, there is all kinds of application regarding showing friendliness/love to strangers for all ages!

Hospitality is a heart issue. Hospitality is loving and caring for strangers. It is inviting people into your home, space, and heart and caring for them! It has application in all cultures and for all believers!

The text tells us to “seek to show hospitality”. The Greek word here for “seek to show” (dioko) means to “aggressively chase” like a hunter pursuing a catch. Stated positively, it means to earnestly pursue. Stated negatively, it means to zealously persecute or hunt down.

There was an event that took place in 2011 that Christine and I will never forget. It has become the measuring stick by which we compare all other challenges and event traumatic experiences. So far, nothing has surpassed or even matched this event. This includes things like pregnancy and childbirth! By the way, this isn't just a naive or insensitive husband speaking, Christine has said this herself.

The event was a four day backpacking trip with the youth group. However, it wasn't the youth that made it difficult. It wasn't the lack of showers or bathroom facilities. It wasn't even our group's decision to leave the toilet paper behind that made this traumatic. It was the mosquitos.

The mosquitos were out in force and earnestly pursued us! We wore mosquito nets over our faces that were beneficial during the day. However, at night while we were sleeping under the stars, the net would rest against one side of your face and in the morning you would discover that the mosquitos had feasted all night long.

As I was studying this passage and the word here for “seek to show” I couldn't help but think of these mosquitos that zealously persecuted us. Obviously, I am not saying that we should follow the example of the mosquito and zealously persecute our guests. The idea is that we earnestly pursue expressing or demonstrating hospitality.

The command here is not just to show hospitality occasionally or when convenient. It is to pursue hospitality earnestly and relentlessly. This means we make it a priority and put significant effort into it.

A parallel passage in 1 Peter tells us to “Show hospitality to one another *without grumbling*.” In other words hospitality requires effort and sacrifice. For many hospitality is not natural and there is a tendency to inwardly grumble while extending it.

But here is some good news. As followers of Christ we have received His nature. In Him hospitality becomes part of our nature, and in looking at Him we get all the motivation we need. That is where the passage leads us this morning as we step back and take a look at the context. It directs our eyes towards Jesus!

I want to try to help us quickly understand the context with a very basic visual map of the book of Romans.

Romans at a Glance



The content of the first eleven chapters is generally doctrine. Chapters twelve through sixteen are generally application. The orange dot is roughly where we find the command regarding hospitality. At the beginning of chapter twelve you see a darker green section. This is the transition or the hinge that ties the doctrine to the application and sets the stage for everything to follow, including the command regarding hospitality.

Let's take a closer look at the hinge here in **Romans 12:1**. *I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.* The primary exhortation that the rest of this chapter and even the rest of the book flows out of, is "present your bodies as a living sacrifice". This is the foundation for the rest of the instruction and application.

I don't want to spend too much time on this, but we need to make sure we have at least a basic understanding of what Paul means by "a living sacrifice". A sacrifice is a vivid picture of giving something up. In the Old Testament an animal was given up in a sacrifice. Here, the believers are instructed to give THEMSELVES up, as LIVING sacrifices. "Living" adds a continuous quality. It is not a one time; once and done; giving oneself to God but rather an ongoing; daily; even minute-by-minute, LIVING sacrifice.

Paul is issuing a call to the believer to live continually on the altar. To continually fight the pull of the old nature and crawl back on the altar. To live a lifetime of constantly dying for Him.

But why? I see two closely connected reasons here in the text. The first is at the beginning of verse 1, *“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God,”* “Therefore” indicates that the basis for this call to constant sacrifice, comes from something that came earlier in the book. And what came earlier in the book is summed up in the phrase “the mercies of God”.

Remember, in the earlier chapters of Romans our condition is laid out. The fact that we are helpless sinners, who apart from Christ’s work on our behalf, have nothing to offer God. We can’t impress Him or endear ourselves to Him. Then against this backdrop the mercies of God are generously presented. They are all the wonderful things that God has done for us through Christ that made us presentable to Him.

So, the first motivation for the believer in presenting their bodies as a living sacrifice is the “mercies of God”. The second part of the motivation comes at the end of the verse, when it says this “is your spiritual worship”. The Greek word translated “spiritual” (logikos) means “divinely reasonable”. In other words, it is reasonable or logical from God’s perspective, from the perspective of faith, or from the perspective of reality.

So Romans 12:1 is saying... In light of the mercies of God, it is only reasonable or logical to present yourselves as living sacrifice. It is our reasonable or logical act of worship!

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the **mercies of God**, to present your bodies as a **living sacrifice**, holy and acceptable to God, which is your **spiritual worship**.

Romans 12:1



This is the basis for verse thirteen where we are commanded to earnestly pursue hospitality. Hospitality is a sacrifice. It is one way to be a living sacrifice and it is a reasonable and fitting response in light of the mercies of God. It is reasonable and fitting worship!

I would like to look at a parallel passage in the Old Testament. It is easy for us to think that the God of the Old Testament was not very hospitable. That His seemingly exclusive relationship with Israel was unloving to those who were not part of the privileged community. But look here at His command to the Israelites in Leviticus. **Leviticus 19:33-34**,³³ *“When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong.”*³⁴ *You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.*

God instructed the people of Israel not to just refrain from wronging a stranger, not even to just treat them like a native, but to love them as they loved themselves. That’s extreme! That’s extreme hospitality.

The reason given is *“for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.”* At minimum this means they could relate to what it was like to be a stranger, but I think there is more. It says “you WERE strangers”. You WERE strangers, but due to the mercies of God you aren’t anymore. I believe He is saying, “Because I demonstrated my love to you when you were strangers, and I rescued you from Egypt, you extend the same kind of love”.

This is a shadow of where we are. Some of “the mercies of God” towards us are found in **Romans 5:8** where it says,⁸ *but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* We weren’t just strangers to God, we were sinners. We had set ourselves in opposition to Him as His enemies. And His response? He didn’t offer pseudo hospitality while inwardly grumbling. He didn’t just forgive us and sign a peace treaty. He didn’t just invite us into his space or to be a privileged people. He invited us into His family! To be His sons and daughters and co-heirs with Christ. And He paid an incredible price to make it possible.

This is why we should earnestly pursue hospitality. Because, in light of the mercies of God, the sacrificial expression of hospitality is a reasonable and fitting act of worship. Our God is radically hospitable. He has demonstrated extreme hospitality towards us. He asks us and empowers us to pass it on. When we demonstrate hospitality, we are expressing the heart of God.

John Piper says it this way, *“...when we practice hospitality, here’s what happens: we experience the refreshing joy of becoming conduits of God’s hospitality rather than being self-decaying cul-de-sacs.”*

I would like to encourage you to join me in taking some time this week, even today, to consider how you can earnestly pursue hospitality. Talk about it with your family (kids aren’t too young to learn to be a friend to those who do not have one.) Take advantage of the FLG Discussion Questions, even if you are not in a group. They may assist you as you seek to make application.

As you consider these things, I would like to offer a few suggestions. First, if you don’t feel compelled to earnestly pursue hospitality don’t focus on hospitality. Focus on the mercies of God! Study His mercies

in passages like Romans 1-11 and ask the Lord to make your heart more like His. The more we know Him and His mercies the more willing we will be to be living sacrifices. We will naturally become more earnest about the pursuit of hospitality.

Second, consider ways you can demonstrate friendliness and love to strangers in the various parts of your life (e.g. work, school, church, community, etc...). Hospitality is not something you just practice at home or at church. It is who we are in Christ and thus it should affect all areas of our lives. Wherever you are...

- Be on the lookout for guests! This will require effort and possibly even sacrifice.
- Go out of your way to meet guests.
- Be willing to be their friend.
- Practice listening and asking good questions.
- Ask the Lord to give you wisdom and opportunity to demonstrate kindness and love.
- Invite guests into your space, your home, your Sunday school class, your fellowship group, your circle of friends, your life, etc...

Please note, it is important to remember that in hospitality we are seeking to demonstrate God's love. We are not looking to impress, show off our home, our cooking, our church, our personality, etc... We are simply expressing and passing on the loving, hospitable heart of God.

I would like to close by just talking briefly about some practical application as a church family. Hospitality is an area that we have understood God to be calling us as a church to grow in lately. This is a heart issue and our primary need is for God to make our hearts more like His. As that happens, we are also working together and identifying some practical ways that we can better care for our guests.

We are working on better supporting and expanding our hospitality teams (greeters, ushers, etc...). We are adding a new greeter position that we are calling hosts who will function as roaming greeters in the foyer and all of our hospitality teams are meeting on March 12, at 3pm, in an effort to coordinate and better express hospitality to our guests.

A number of you have expressed interest in participating in a coordinated effort to show hospitality by being available to invite guests over for lunch after our Sunday morning services. We are asking the Lord to give wisdom in coordinating that effectively. But don't wait for or rely on a system... Invite away! A system may be helpful but the organic invitation will often be more meaningful.

We are working on a number of facility updates with hospitality in mind. Nate Mulkey is using his skills to assist us through signage. Nate and Michelle are working together on updating our Children's Sunday School Wing in an effort to make it more welcoming to kids and their families. A number of people have generously used their skills and gifts in our recent foyer update and there is more to come. Please let us know if you are interested in being involved. There is a Hospitality Interest List at the west kiosk. It is really a joy to work together/worship together in this effort!

While these practical expressions of hospitality are important, let's keep in mind that they are lipstick on a pig, to borrow one of Pastor Dan's sayings, if it is separate from hearts that reflect God's heart! Hearts that love because He first loved us!

Remember that hospitality isn't natural and will require sacrifice. But it is a sacrifice that is fitting and reasonable worship, in light of the mercies and nature of our radically hospitable God.

“WORSHIP THROUGH HOSPITALITY”

Romans 12:1 & 13

Main Idea: In light of God’s mercies, the pursuit of sacrificial hospitality is a reasonable/fitting act of worship.

Command: “seek to show hospitality” (13)

Hospitality

Earnestly pursue it

Root Appeal: “present your bodies as a living sacrifice” (1)

Sacrifice

Living

Why?

Because of the mercies of God

It is your reasonable/fitting worship

Application

Necessary starting point: Know the mercies of God!

Consider ways to make this practical

Becoming a more hospitable church

Family Life Groups

“Worship Through Hospitality”

Romans 12:1 & 13

Main Idea: In light of God’s mercies, the pursuit of sacrificial hospitality is a reasonable/fitting act of worship.

1. Can you share a time when you experienced Christ-like hospitality? Stated another way, can you think of a time that a stranger, or someone you didn’t know very well, demonstrated kindness, care, or love towards you?

2. What are some appropriate motivations for hospitality?

3. In what ways might the earnest pursuit of hospitality require you to be a living sacrifice?

4. What is a measurable goal you would be willing to set this week in regard to hospitality (e.g. Next Sunday I will look for someone at church that is new or that I do not know very well and extend friendliness/love to them)? If you are willing, please share this goal with your Family Life Group so they can be praying for you and can ask you about it at your next gathering.

Questions? Feel free to contact Pastor Brad Dettwyler at brad@ebcsalem.com.