

Over the past few weeks, God has been teaching us through His Word that we need to be open-hearted, open-eyed, open-mouthed people so that we will take the good news about Jesus through the open doors that we've been praying for this year. And I want to bring this short series to an end with this thought: the door that you've been praying open might be your own front door. One of the chief ways that God demonstrates His openness to the world is through the open doors of the homes of His people. God wants you to invite a person or family that you've been praying for and sharing the good news about Jesus with into your home.

An open home is a home where the people inside are eager to open their lives and hearts to other through welcome, hospitality, and Christian love. As our text today instructs us, Christians are to seek to show hospitality, offering food, rest, and fellowship to those outside their immediate family. And here's one reason why: almost everyone who comes to faith without having grown up in a Christian home has shared a meal *with a Christian* before they come and share a meal *with Jesus*. Spending time with Christians in a Christlike home should lead unbelievers to want to spend time with Christ in Christ's home. Coming to faith in Jesus makes a lot more sense in the context of a life and a home shaped by faith in Jesus.

But the main reason why we should be cultivating open homes and showing hospitality is not merely pragmatic, just because it works. We need to look deeper: what makes hospitality so effective? *Why* does it work? And the reason why your hospitality can lead to their salvation is because God's hospitality led to your salvation! The main reason why your home ought to be open to others is because God's home is open to you.

Consider this: it was God's open nature that led Him to the ultimate act of hospitality, the creation of the world. God made a home for everything in the world! Now that's hospitality! And, as it turns out, that hospitality came with a significant risk, one that often stops us from showing hospitality: what if our guests mess things up? What if they break our stuff or trash our home? What if they hurt us? Godlike hospitality isn't naive about the very real risks. God knows what He's asking you to do, and He knows that it might cost you a great deal. But just like He went ahead and opened up the world He made, He calls you to open up your home.

God's open nature not only led to creation, but even when God's guests ruined His perfect world, instead of shutting His doors forever, God chose to keep them open and repair the damage out of His own resources. That's the heart of hospitality: sharing what's yours with others. When hospitality requires you to give of yourself, your time, or your stuff, those aren't reasons to *stop* showing hospitality; that's the whole point! Self-giving love is the heart of hospitality, because it's the heart of the gospel! That's why hospitality is so effective in representing Christ to non-Christians - every act of hospitality is a picture of the gospel, God giving Himself for us.

And that's the other thing: Hospitality is *costly* - God's hospitality cost Him the life of His beloved Son - but hospitality for Christ's sake is always rewarded. God promises to make it up to you, and so the person who shows gospel hospitality is putting their faith in God's promises to work. All hospitality is by faith; faith that self-giving love out of a Christ-centered heart *will be rewarded!* This means that you *cannot* lose by showing hospitality! If you lose time, possessions, money, or what have you, for Jesus' sake, Jesus said that that's the way to find your life! And in fact, closing your doors to protect yourself and your stuff from others is the surest way to *lose* it.

But looking to Jesus, the reward for His self-giving hospitality comes in the fact that when He returns and joins heaven to earth, He fulfils God's goal in creation. Look at how the story ends, Rev. 21:1-3. God remakes heaven and earth, cleansing it completely from sin and its effects, so that (v.3) "Behold, the dwelling of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be His people, and God Himself will be with them as their God." The Bible's ultimate picture of salvation is God's people enjoying God's hospitality forever!

And so the *motivation* for our hospitality is God's hospitality toward us. The *example* for our hospitality is God's hospitality toward us. And the *provision* for our hospitality is found in God's hospitality toward us. The what, the how, and the why of our hospitality are all found in the hospitality that God has shown us in the gospel. I'll say it another way: if you have Jesus, you have all you need to be hospitable! Doubting that is *unbelief*, and not engaging in it is *disobedience*.

And for those of you who want to say that you are *ready* and *willing* to show hospitality, today's text actually presses you even further. It doesn't say: "Be willing." It doesn't say "Be ready." God says, "*Seek* to show hospitality." Don't wait until the opportunity finds you, go look

for it! And here is where it gets challenging: if you're not showing hospitality, it isn't because God hasn't brought any opportunities your way; it's because you haven't sought them out! Between you and God, someone has done His job: God made a world, and filled it with people to show hospitality to. If you can't find them, you aren't looking! On the other hand, if your eyes are open, then your home will be open, too.

And so I want to make two points about what happens in an open home, and then I want to give you ten suggestions to help you open up your home for the sake of Jesus and the gospel.

So what happens in an open home? Two things: discipleship and hospitality. Or, *training* for mission and *engaging* in mission. An open home starts with a decision; the decision to obey God and seek to show hospitality, the decision to stop seeing your home as a *fortress* against the world, or as a *retreat* from the world, and start seeing it as a *mission outpost of God's kingdom*.

After that decision is made, you need to get everyone on board so that your whole family embraces this mission for your home, and you need to train everyone in the art of hospitality. Dad, you need to teach your household what God expects, and you also need to enable not just a hospitable *house*, but hospitable *hearts* by managing expectations, encouraging participation, and modeling joyful sacrifice. You need to help your family realize that showing hospitality doesn't take away from family life; hospitality is what God made your family *for*. Your family doesn't exist for itself; it exists for others.

At the same time, you also need to realize that if you prioritize hospitality over the family, then you risk losing both. An overextended, exasperated family will grow to resent hospitality, and when that happens, your ability to open your home is crippled. Although most of us might not be in any imminent danger of it, there *is* such a thing as too much hospitality, as well as hospitality done poorly, and you need to know both the warning signs and the remedies.

For a Christian family, hospitality starts with Bible study: knowing what God says, thinking about why He's said it, and learning from God's people how to do it. The key emphases in hospitality discipleship are learning to do hospitality well, and not growing weary in well-doing. So consider this sermon a trailer for the next session of Sunday School, as Mike will be

leading us through a study in hospitality. Keep an eye out for the book here soon, and go ahead and make plans to join us before worship, starting in a few months.

But nothing teaches like on-the-job training, and so seeking to show hospitality isn't like brain surgery: it doesn't start with years of school before you ever get a live patient! You can cover all the discipleship you need in order to get started in one conversation at lunch today, so that the invitation can go out before dinner. Hospitality is learned by *doing*, both giving and receiving. The Bowen family has learned many of our best lessons by being on the receiving end of some wonderful hospitality, watching and learning, not like scientists with clipboard in hand, but simply by experiencing true welcome and friendship. When that happens, you find yourself automatically talking about it on the way home!

And so as we seek to show hospitality, both aspects of training and hosting should be ongoing on a regular basis. For some people, this happens naturally, but for many of us, this means having a plan, setting goals, and keeping track of how things are going. Our text today exhorts us to seek to show hospitality, the sermon hopefully has brought the point home, but this knowledge will simply inflate our heads unless we start doing it. So the charge this morning is to pick a time, pick some people, and invite them over. Don't just *learn*; don't just *plan*; do it! Show hospitality this week.

Finally, I want to jumpstart the process by listing ten practical suggestions for seeking to show hospitality. Here are ten ideas that will help you live out what you've heard this morning, beginning with five ideas for cultivating a hospitable home and hospitable hearts, and then five suggestions to prepare you to show hospitality.

So for hospitality discipleship, number 1: put out an extra chair at the table at each meal. Set the expectation that your home is not just for you.

Number 2: Make hospitality a line item in the family budget. Hospitality is costly, and trying to do it with dollars that aren't there won't work.

Number 3: Surround hospitality with gratitude: when you show hospitality, make sure to thank each member of your family for the part they played. If you receive a thank-you note, read

it to everyone, so that they will know their efforts were appreciated. When you receive hospitality, send a thank-you note, and have everyone at least sign it.

Number 4: Ask the kids who to invite. Involve them in the process of intentional hospitality. Sure, they will probably suggest their friends, but as long as they are involved in the process, you can broaden their horizons as you go. And they just might broaden yours, too.

Number 5: Prep your children with a question to ask of guests they don't know. Include them in the conversation, and teach them about propriety and making guests feel welcome.

And for *doing* hospitality, here are five more. Number 6: Set a family goal for frequency – 6-8x a year, monthly, weekly – find what works for your family. Be ready for spur-of-the-moment opportunities, but *seeking* to show hospitality involves *intentionality* as well as *spontaneity*.

Number 7: Have a “hospitality meal” planned. Remember, you aren't entertaining dignitaries; you are sharing what you have with others. It doesn't need to be fancy; just have a plan, and keep most of what you need on hand, even if it's a giant lasagna in the freezer!

Number 8: Prepare to sleep one more person or couple. Do you have an air mattress, and some extra sheets and towels? With Advent coming up next week, think about having Joseph and Mary knock on your door, and make room to show hospitality.

Number 9: Have a hospitality box/basket/bag. Fill it with toiletries, snacks, water bottles, and a card with your wi-fi password. Act like you're expecting guests, even before you know their names.

Number 10: Start with your church family, and watch the church emails! You can tell when a church has really understood God's hospitality towards them, because they show that same love and welcome to one another, and they start throwing sanctified elbows to be the first to open their homes up to others.

God has opened His home to you in Christ, and now He calls you to open up your home for Jesus' sake, and the gospel's. So seek to show hospitality,

- *In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.*