

Hey hey, welcome... We're glad you're here. My name is John and I'm the worship pastor on staff here. We're in this series called **SHARE CHRISTMAS** and in it, we're pointing all of our focus on the Christmas narrative, and then thinking how we can **share** this wonderful story with the people around us. And not just in spoken form, like sitting down and reading them Luke 2, but **sharing** with our actions, our attitudes, and, when appropriate, our words. **It's like being an evangelist simply by WHO WE ARE, not by what we say or memorize or recite.**

Last week, Jeff opened this series with the topic of reconciliation. We see this incredible moment in Joseph's life when he finds out Mary is pregnant and he's planning on breaking it off with her, because clearly she's been sleeping with another man, when all of a sudden, **God shows up in Joseph's life and changes the course of history.** Joseph is reconciled to Mary, the child is born, they name Him Jesus, and through that child... **God and man are reconciled forever.** Beautiful. One reconciliation leads to another.

This week, we'll be talking about something that we all love to think we're good at... We make **Pinterest** boards about it. We have **TV shows** about, we even have **college degrees** about it... But it's something that we, as a culture, in America, have almost across-the-board become too busy to practice: **Hospitality.** This is an enormous theme throughout Scripture, and a mandate for anyone that desires to follow Jesus' example of life (and life to the full). The word hospitality has all sorts of connotations, I'm sure all sorts of different images and feelings come to mind for you when you hear the word.

Maybe you think of a warm home, a good meal, or a cup of coffee with a close friend. Or maybe, if you're anything like my wife, you think of the **WORK** that goes into creating that warm home and good meal... Don't get me wrong, she **LOVES** opening our home to friends (and strangers) but she knows, unlike myself, when I'm inviting people over for dinner, that I'm signing us up for a little bit of work.

Earlier this week, I asked a question on Facebook and many of you responded. I asked what were some of the things that made you feel **TRULY WELCOME** in a home (or any other space, for that matter) and there were some great responses.

- **Isaiah** said, "The smell of a meal." Apparently, doesn't take much to impress him, just light a candle that smells like lasagna and he's good.
- **Rachel** said, "It makes me feel comfortable when somebody's house is as messy as mine and they don't apologize for it." I love that. And so true.
- **Josh** said, "A comfortable place to sit, where you don't mind sitting and talking for a long while."
- **Krista** said, "When others let their guards down. When someone invites me into their 'real life', not just the clean-up, pretty, perfect version."

- **Amy** said, and I love this, *“I think I’m the minority here, but perhaps my fellow introverts will agree - I feel welcome and loved when SILENCE IS ALLOWED (and isn’t completely awkward).”* And it turns out, **she wasn’t the minority**. A bunch of people responded to her comment and agreed wholeheartedly. *“When SILENCE IS ALLOWED.”* That’s huge.

There were dozens others, with great perspective and intentionality, but we don’t have enough time here to share them all.

What these responses showed me was that **hospitality** is incredibly important, and that it’s universally a “perceived” thing. It’s not something that someone tells you they’re doing, like, *“I’m being hospitable right now! I’m HOSTING YOU!”* **Which might equate to some of those introvert’s deaths.** It’s just something that people pick up on... **It’s almost a hind-sight realization.** Like as you walk away from a home or a party or a place, you recognize, *“Wow, that was special.”* Something about that experience sticks with you.

I remember some of times that I’ve felt most “at home” in foreign places. When I first started the **worship school**, the beginning of an 18-month intensive, where you sleep in a guy’s basement for a week (which I realize sounds weirder than it is) and when I first walked in their home, they were all busy in the kitchen, I was greeted by a few of them, I think one of them handed me a beer, and then they were all back to work... But it just felt like home. It was a balance of *“Welcome! We’re so glad you’re here.”* and *“This kitchen is your kitchen. If you want something, grab it out of the fridge. We’re in the middle of making dinner.”* Like it was my parent’s home.

Another time was the first time Jed and Beth welcomed Elyse and I over to their home. We must’ve talked for 4 hours... And the **focus** and intentionality of their listening and **questions** and **genuine interest** in our lives really made us feel loved.

Outside of your home, where have you felt most at home? And why?

We’re going to be talking about **hospitality** today, about what IT IS, and what it ISN’T, we’ll talk about where it shows up in Scripture, and about why it’s so important for us to get this right... as disciples, to model this in our every day lives.

Where do we get the idea of hospitality in Scripture? Where does this first show up?

I'd say that it first shows up in Genesis 1. Think about it, in the beginning, there was God. Father, Spirit, Son in perfect relationship. Complete, without need. But then... God decides to create space for someone new... **God didn't create us because He was lonely. God was fully complete before you and I arrived.** But because of God's great love, and because He is hospitable... He created a place for life. **Earth.** And on the earth He created a space for man and woman, **the garden.** Everything that was needed by us to survive and thrive was there in the garden. God shows Himself to be an incredibly gracious host.

God begins the story by demonstrating hospitality. But it doesn't stop there. There are a number of other stories in the Old Testament that demonstrate hospitality, and (and this unique) the gifts that guests bring with them for their hosts. We see this relationship between people creating space for others, opening their homes, providing meals, and **then the gifts and rewards that the hosts receive as a result of their hospitality.**

Genesis 18:1-15 • Abraham welcomes strangers in and they end up being sent from the Lord, the gift they bring is a message: that Sarah will give birth to a son, Isaac.

Genesis 19 • Lot opens his home to travelers that end up being angels. The gift they bring is warning and protection from the judgement about to be heaped down on their city. Lot and his family flee and escape Sodom and Gomorrah just in time. (In fact, it's believed that one of the primary "sins" of the city that caused the destruction was that of inhospitality. Hostility towards their guests. Check out Ezekiel 16:49)

These stories in Genesis are what Hebrews 13:2 is referencing when the author writes: *"Don't forget to show hospitality to strangers, for some who have done this have entertained angels without realizing it!"*

1 Kings 17:9-24 • The widow of Zeraphath (you know Zeraphath, great guy) offers food and shelter to Elijah, and in turn, he raises her son from the dead.

Crazy, miraculous stories of hospitality (and the gifts that the guests bring with them). God is clearly trying to weave the heart of hospitality throughout the Old Testament. There are even laws around it, Leviticus 19:34 *"The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the Lord your God."*

There are around 30 different passages in Scripture in regards to hospitality.

And then... about 2/3 of the way through the Bible, here's where the story takes a bit of a sad turn... In the beginning, God creates space for us. He welcomes us. Guides us. Loves us unconditionally. **Then it's His turn to enter the story.** God decides that He's going to show up in our world. He's going to see how hospitable we as humans are... Let's open our Bibles to Luke 2.

- **Luke 2:1** *At that time the Roman emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire. 2 (This was the first census taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria.) 3 All returned to their own ancestral towns to register for this census. 4 And because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David's ancient home. He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee. 5 He took with him Mary, his fiancée, who was now obviously pregnant. 6 And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born. 7 She gave birth to her first child, a son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, **because there was no lodging available for them.***

So we meet a very pregnant Mary (this translation says she was “now obviously pregnant”), and I don't know about you, but when my wife has been pregnant, I've learned to give her whatever she wants! But apparently Bethlehem didn't get the memo... **This is a sad part of the story.** Because God shows up, and you know what we do? **We don't make space.** The little town is completely full from all the people traveling back for the census, and God is essentially born in a gas-station bathroom.

And we can't blame that town for being full. Anyone of us would be in the same position. If we ran a little hostel or bed and breakfast and our rooms were overfull, it's very likely that we'd turn a young man and woman away. But I believe God uses this to set the stage for how Jesus would be received by the world. How humanity would wrestle with God being amongst them. A bit of foreshadowing. God is looking for **hospitality** and yet receives a bit of **hostility**.

My friend Seth McCoy defines **hospitality** as: **Making space for someone when you don't have to.** When it's not mandated. When it requires us to move things around in our own lives. When it's not necessarily convenient. **Making space for someone when you don't have to.**

Henri Nouwen, in his book called "Reaching Out" (which completely rocked my world) writes, **"Hospitality, therefore, means primarily the creation of a free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy."**

The German word of hospitality is **Gast-freund-schaft** which means, *"friendship for the guest."*

In India, hospitality is based on their principle of **Atithi Devo Bhava** which means *"The Guest is God."* This is a concept that Jesus supports in texts like Matthew 25, when He says, *"I tell you the truth, when you saw me hungry and fed me, when I was thirsty and you gave me a drink, when I was a stranger and you showed me hospitality... When you did this for one of the least of these, my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me."* He's essentially saying, *"Whenever you show hospitality to ANY stranger, you're showing me hospitality."* **That's how intimately connected Jesus is with all of humanity.**

Hospitality derives from the Latin *"hospes"* which means **stranger as guest**, which is where terms like hospital, hosting, hospice care, hostels, hotels... All come from the *"hospes"* root. Another close variation is *"hostis,"* which means **stranger as enemy**, which is where **hostility** comes from. Again, Henri Nouwen, says that a necessary movement for all Christians is learning to convert our **hostility into hospitality.**

Let's talk about that for a moment... Hostility. Another quote from Nouwen:

- *"Although we might want to show sympathy for the poor, the lonely, the homeless and the rejected, our feelings toward a stranger knocking on our door and asking for food and shelter is uncertain at the best. In general we do not expect much from strangers. We say to each other: "You better hide your money, lock your door and chain your bike." (HIDE YO KIDS! HIDE YO WIFE!) **People who are unfamiliar, speak another language, have another color, wear a different type of clothes and live a life style different from ours, make us afraid and even hostile.***

(Does this ring any bells for you with today's conversation around **Syrian refugees** and presidential candidates talking about **Muslims**? It should.)

I think what Nouwen's book is saying, which was written in 1975 (mind you), still rings incredibly true today. We **WANT** to show sympathy for the poor. We **WANT** to help people.

Especially as Christians, we see things on the news that tear our hearts open... But if those same people were knocking on our doors? We might not respond how we'd WANT to...

Our hearts long for supportive, inclusive, healthy community. Neighborhoods with all of the homes having open doors. A place for everyone to **BELONG**...

So, we've created online platforms for us to "find community" with others... while sitting safely by ourselves in our locked apartments. **Facebook was created to connect people, and it has.** Over 1.5 billion users. That's 20% of the earth's population. **20% of the earth's population has a Facebook profile.** 5 new profiles are created every second. 300 million photos are uploaded each day. Every minute, there are 293,000 statuses updated. (We REALLY want people to "Like" what we're doing.)

In a world of being MORE connected than any civilization in the history of humanity... **We are more lonely than ever.** Are we not? Something that was designed to make the world smaller and to bring people together, has inadvertently become a hostile battleground, where people leave feeling more **isolated, burdened** and **self-focused** than when they first logged in or opened the app. Is that not true? **How many times have you found your blood boiling from someone's Facebook post? Maybe even a close friend's post? Scholars named the 2000s the Age of Information, but now we're calling the 20-teens the Age of the Opinion.** Facts are no longer required for a Facebook post to go viral. And these things isolate and alienate us from one another. They do!

And trust me, I'm critiquing from the inside. I'm very much a user of Facebook. I have over 2,000 friends, and I have an intimate friendship with each and every one of them... Just kidding. But I understand the power of it, my wife and I use it to generate tens of thousands of dollars in revenue for our clients with our design company, I'm connected with long lost friends, I keep track of friends in the Army and the Navy, as they travel all over the world... It's a beautiful thing. **BUT,** Pastor Matt Chandler said this once and it has stuck with me... **"Social media is to relationships what a multi-vitamin is to a healthy diet. It's a supplement, it's not a meal replacement."** How many of you guys have eaten a multi-vitamin on an empty stomach? You know what happens. You throw up! **In a world of being MORE connected than any civilization in the history of humanity... We are more lonely than ever.**

We need to get out from behind the computer screens and come back around the table. We need to stop living off of supplements and have an actual meal.

At the end of your life, will you regret how much time you spend in front of a screen?

This is important, because these are things that get in the way of us follow Jesus' example of hospitality. When we look at His life, we see Him making time for others, He sacrificed his "schedule" when people needed Him, He fed people when they were hungry (and sometime 5000+ people!).

I believe there two primary threats to hospitality:

1. **Occupation**
2. **Pre-Occupation**

The first is about the busyness of our **schedules**,
The second is about the busyness of our **minds**.

Occupation seems to be where Bethlehem was that evening in Luke 2. The crowds poured in and flooded a small town. The day was likely full of the markets being emptied of their food, crowds in the town square, all the rooms being reserved and maybe even fought over. **The town's people were occupied. Their schedules were insane.** They didn't recognize the opportunity to open their homes to a young woman, who might've already been in pre-labor. Some of those pre-labor contractions are NO JOKE! **Bethlehem missed their opportunity to welcome Jesus into the world.**

We tend to devote our lives to busyness, especially during this season. And it might not even be intentional. It seems that we're victims of our own culture. Holiday **parties** on every weekend, long **car rides** with children in carseats begging for snacks every 6 minutes (parents, you know!), **waiting in lines** at grocery stores, **traffic, wrapping** presents, ordering last minute presents on **Amazon Prime**... **In all of this, do we miss our opportunity to welcome Jesus into our worlds?**

I can't help but think of MARY & MARTHA... **Luke 10: 38-42**

- *As Jesus and the disciples continued on their way to Jerusalem, they came to a certain village where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. 39 Her sister, Mary, sat at the Lord's feet, listening to what he taught. 40 But Martha was distracted by the big dinner she was preparing. She came to Jesus and said, "Lord, doesn't it seem unfair to you that my sister just sits here while I do all the work? Tell her to come and help me." 41 But the Lord said to her, "My dear Martha, you are worried and upset over*

all these details! 42 There is only one thing worth being concerned about. Mary has discovered it, and it will not be taken away from her."

What had Mary discovered? Sitting at Jesus' feet. Listening. Allowing Jesus to speak. THOSE are the things that can never be taken away from us. Intimate moments of connection with Jesus.

And this is a necessary lesson for us, because Martha is doing what we would consider to be "hospitality" by today's standards! **She was cooking a big meal.** But, at the end of the day, the things Jesus said that day, the things He was teaching to Mary, were **far more important** than any "big dinner" He ate that day. The SPACE created for Him to speak with people He loved was more important than the **food** and **decorations** and the **holiday scented candles.**

So that's occupation. Busyness. Crazy schedules. **And a step beyond occupation is pre-occupation...** So that even when we do have a moment of silence, when the children are in bed, we shut off the TV, and we lay down for the night... **Our minds are still going 100mph. Pre-Occupation** means that our minds are occupying space that our bodies aren't even in yet. How many times have you **laid in bed already thinking about a conversation you need to have tomorrow?** Maybe it's someone you need to confront at work or a conversation you need to have with your child or your spouse, or a close friend that's making bad life choices... And you find yourself thinking, *"Ok, this is how I'm going to say it... I'm going to bring it up by starting way out in left field and then I'm going to ask them about this..."* **Our mind is occupying space that doesn't even exist yet...** I'm laying in bed having a conversation with myself.

I love Ramakrishna's metaphor: ***The mind is a tree full of monkeys jumping from branch to branch.*** Or from our faith, I think of the Desert Fathers and Mothers. They compare the way our minds ordinarily work to a **hive swarming with bees, or a small pool of stirred-up muddy water that needs time to settle.**

Jesus spoke about this with His disciples... **Matthew 6:34** *"Don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today's trouble is enough for today."* Jesus is giving us permission to take life one day at a time.

Here's how pre-occupation destroys hospitality. You have someone over, or you're visiting someone in their home... And **your mind is not there.** Your body is present, your mind is not.

This is where I think the “introverts” on my Newsfeed got it entirely right... Another quote from Henri Nouwen:

- ***“Empty space tends to create fear. As long as our minds, hearts and hands are occupied we can avoid confronting the painful questions, to which we never give much attention and which we do not want to surface. “Being busy” has become a status symbol, and most people keep encouraging each other to keep their body and mind in constant motion... Hosts often feel that they have to talk all the time to their guests and entertain them with things to do, places to see and people to visit. But by filling up every empty corner and occupying every empty time their hospitality becomes more oppressing than revealing.”***

When you’re spending time with someone, do you allow space? When you’re hosting someone in your home, are you creating space? Or simply creating another form of entertainment and distraction and busyness for your guests?

So Bethlehem got it wrong. They missed their opportunity. But not everyone on that day missed their chance at hospitality...

Matthew 2:10-11

- *“When [the Magi] saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped Him. Then they opened their treasures and presented Him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh...”*

The Magi got it right. This Latin, *Magi*, (the plural of *magus*) is where we get our word *magician*. These guys were basically Magician-Astrologer-Scientists... So basically, these guys are VERY weird. Heady folk.

These are NOT the people we’d assume would receive Jesus, ESPECIALLY in the town of David. And yet, they were **paying attention**. They weren’t occupied, they weren’t pre-occupied. **Some scholars believe they traveled for upwards of two years, bringing these gifts. They created space for someone when they didn’t need to.** A group of crazy Magician-Astrologer-Scientists. Creating space for God.

Will we live our lives like the **frantic inn-keepers of Bethlehem**, or will we keep watch for the **miraculous like the Magi**?

Will we run around our homes like **busy, pre-occupied Marthas**, or will we sit in the **presence of our guests and listen**?

Will we sit at the feet of the **Great Guest**, our Savior, and listen?

What we've learned here is that Hospitality isn't so much a **practice** as it is a **posture**. Wherever you are, whether guests are in your home, or you're in someone else's home... Create space.

Harbor, the next few weeks can go one of two ways... We can either race, race, race and have all these moments flash before our eyes... Or we can slow down, and keep our eyes open for the **Divine in the daily**, and to **see Christ in our common, every-day lives**.

May we lay down our occupations, our pre-occupations, and may we create space for the Spirit of the Lord this Christmas.

Let's pray...