

# Hospitality is Not Optional: Five Ways to Pursue Other People

June 9, 2017

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A few months ago I wrote about the importance of hospitality and [five ways to show hospitality in the church](#). Today, I want to offer five more.

While much hospitality focuses on individuals or families opening their homes to others, a vital practice which enables “house churches” to meet (e.g., Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:19), I am focusing attention on churches gathering outside of the home. Thus, spring-boarding from 1 Corinthians 16, a passage overflowing with gospel labor, here are five more ways we can pursue hospitality in the church.

## Five Ways to Pursue Hospitality

### 1. Introduce people and build networks for ministry.

In 1 Corinthians 16, Paul is doing all he can to urge Apollos to return to Corinth and minister to them (v. 12); he is urging godly servants like the household of Stephanas to lead (v. 15) and others to follow (v. 16). He is sending Timothy to Corinth (v. 10) and he delights to receive Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus (v. 17). Moreover, he sends greetings from the churches in Asia to the church in Corinth (v. 19), he himself sends greetings (v. 21) and he passes on the hearty greetings of Aquila and Priscilla (v. 20). In short, Paul was an extraordinary networker, who delighted to connect people to other people.

Indeed, it seems that following Jesus’ model, he did nothing without bringing others with him. In this way, he built up the body of Christ by introducing members of the body to one another. This happened at the personal level and the church level. And it is something we should do as well. Whether in ministry or not, we should all be aware of who our brothers and sisters in Christ are and how we can mediate conversation, friendships, and partnerships for the gospel.

### 2. Invite someone to coffee, lunch, or to anything you are doing.

Such introductions can take place anywhere, but lasting, loving relationships need something more than momentary hallway conversations. To foster relationships, therefore, we must go deeper—or at least, we must go longer. This might look like grabbing coffee or a meal together. Maybe it looks like taking a new couple out to lunch after church, or setting up a play date with another family, or intentionally inviting someone from another age demographic to join your game night.

Creativity and availability are key here. If you are willing to reach out to others, you will reap the blessing of being a conduit of grace to them. Often we fail to invite others because we think unless we can set aside time for them alone, the time would be wasted. But that’s not

true at all. Discipleship best occurs in the midst of the mundane. So, look for ways to grab coffee, but don't neglect drive time, chore time, or going-to-the grocery time. You'd be surprised how many ways you can redeem the time, when you think: How can I bring someone with me?

### **3. Invite someone to your community group or start a discipleship group.**

Moving from the informal to the more formal, it is important to help church visitors find contact points other than Sunday morning worship. Most people stay in church when they make relational connection. And one 1-hour worship service a week is not sufficient to make that connection.

For that reason, our church has community groups that meet throughout the week. These times of fellowship enable us to talk more openly about life challenges and personal application of the Bible. But people may not know about them or want to go without a personal invitation.

At the same time, we should look for ways to gather groups of believers. You might call this a disciples group and it might include Bible study, prayer, mentoring, or just intentional times of men or women gathering to exhort one another from God's Word.

Both of these groups are tangible places in the church body where community and care are fostered. When medical crises and personal loss afflict us, our community groups are there to step in. Yet, such care can only be felt as people commit to a weekly community group. Likewise, when life-changing decisions need to be made, what better forum than a group of Bible-saturated believers to pray with and listen to. Still, such connections depend on individuals taking initiative to invite others.

### **4. Never minister alone.**

To further this point, we might say: Don't try to follow Christ by yourself, and never minister alone.

In his book [\*Never Eat Alone\*](#), Keith Ferrazzi makes the case for taking people to lunch to learn from them. But he also stresses the need to be generous with your time and resources, seeking to serve others instead of using them to serve you. Plagiarizing Jesus (Acts 20:35) he says, "It's better to give before you receive." And again, "Real networking [is] about finding ways to make other people more successful." Indeed, whenever we do anything for the Lord our aim should another's benefit. But it is possible to serve one group while robbing another.

Here's what I mean. If in all your teaching, serving, hosting, helping you always serve *alone*, you are robbing another generation from learning how to teach, serve, host, or help. Scripture teaches us, the normative way to do ministry is in community—two-by-two, in groups, or within or sent out from the local church.

Indeed, we are not simply called to serve God, we are called to bring others with us. Paul says to Timothy, "what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also" (2 Timothy 2:2). Clearly, God intends for his disciples to disciple others as they make disciples of others. Indeed, the Christian faith and the Christian ministry are meant to be shared.

And this transferral of discipleship comes not only face-to-face as we instruct those who might listen, but also side-by-side as we labor with those who already are. Therefore, if you to want magnify community and mission in the church, stop doing things by yourself and invite someone along. In the classroom, or the Bible study, or the personal visitation, invite someone to go with you. Stop doing ministry alone and look for ways to multiply your labors.

## **5. Greet one another with a holy kiss.**

Finally, hospitality must not neglect the body. Typically, hospitality involves some sort of food, but we must also have a category for physical touch and what Paul calls the “holy kiss.”

In 1 Corinthians 16:20, he writes “Greet one another with a holy kiss.” In fact, he says this four times in his letters (Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 16:20; 2 Corinthians 13:12; 1 Thessalonians 5:26); Peter says it once (1 Peter 5:14). Interestingly, this is the same number of times the Lord’s Supper is mentioned in Scripture. Yet, how many of us practice this “holy kiss” or know how to?

Without making the church a kissing booth, there is an important principle that underlies Paul command. If our church is a family, then family affection is appropriate—and necessary. In his book [\*Sensing Jesus\*](#), Zack Eswine makes this point and argues for the place of sanctified touch. He writes,

The “holy kiss” envisions a way for christian community to recover in Jesus how human beings were originally meant to touch each other. Physical touch is meant as a holy act. Few of us know in an experiential way what it means to touch or be touched in a sacred way. Profane touch has mentored and broken most of us. (183)

Put succinctly, physical touch matters. We are not walking brains or disembodied souls. We have bodies—aching, tired, untrustworthy bodies. And as we hobble through this world, it is appropriate to pat a back, hug a side, grab an elbow, or hold a hand. Yes, culture will dictate practice—hence the reason we may not greet each other with a kiss. But make no mistake, we must communicate grace to *bodies* and souls.

The widow needs more than a “Hello, how are you?” She needs a hug. Children need more than a “Slow down, stop running.” They need a gentle pat on the head from strong men. The redeemed prostitute needs more than “I’m glad you are here,” she needs to receive the touch of godly women *and* to learn that men’s eyes are not just vehicles of lust but also instruments for empathy. In short, to be the body of Christ, we must care for the bodies of others.

Much could be misunderstood about this call for physical touch, but that only shows how desperately we need our Lord to sanctify our misguided understanding of the body. As Eswine says, “Until the gospel rightly changes our use of touch, we are less ready for ministry than we realize” (pp. 186–87). See chapter 6 in [\*Sensing Jesus\*](#).

## **Hospitality is not an Optional Endeavor**

In the end, we must remember Jesus was forsaken that we would be received by the Father. And being received by our heavenly father, we are supplied with every spiritual blessing (Ephesians 1:3) and then called to receive others (Rom 15:7). Surely this includes sharing the message of Christ, but it also includes sharing our lives (1 Thessalonians 2:8). And because the Word of God communicates love to embodied creatures, we must learn how to do more than speak words. We must pursue hospitality.

As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 16:8, "I do not want to see you now just in passing. I hope to spend some time with you." In these words, we learn true gospel ministry—for apostles and auto mechanics—devotes itself to the whole man. In spending ample time with the Corinthians, Paul indicates his desire to be in their homes, at their tables, around their places of work—maybe even at their burial site. Such life-on-life ministry is filled with giving and receiving, hosting and helping. In other words, ministry is hospitality, and hospitality that is more than an event. It is simply the Christian way of life.

Indeed, may this way of life be our own. And may we continue to pray and think and plan ways we can pursue hospitality to share both our lives and the life-giving message of Christ with others.

Soli Deo Gloria, ds