

# HOSPITALITY WITHOUT A HOME

*Stephen Simmons, Deacon of Communications*

What would you do if someone told you to be more hospitable? Would you happily seek opportunities to practice hospitality, or grumble about the state of your home, your wallet, your calendar, your interest level, and so on?

If you chose the latter, don't let the Apostle Peter know; he expressly said in his first letter, "Show hospitality to others without grumbling."<sup>1</sup> We find similar calls to hospitality throughout the New Testament<sup>2</sup>, a drumbeat of other-focused love echoing the Old Testament's repeated command to love the orphan, the widow, and the stranger<sup>3</sup>.

But here's the real kicker: Peter isn't talking to folks with stunning houses in Myers Park, or young professionals with pristine Google Calendars. He's talking to persecuted exiles<sup>4</sup>. A quick Google search of "Do exiles have homes?" will provide this stunning answer: No.

Show hospitality without a home? I thought hospitality meant rolling out the red carpet to a full dinner spread, like Lumiere and his singing dishes. How am I supposed to do that with three roommates and a living room barely big enough for a TV and my vitally important video game collection? I would love to be more hospitable, but with my current situation there's just no way!

As soothing as that excuse may be for our comfort-seeking hearts, it doesn't cut it for Jesus. His command was to live like he lived, and he demonstrated hospitality perfectly. "But he was Jesus; his home must have been perfect," you may say. Not quite: his home didn't exist. He said himself, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."<sup>5</sup>

How could Jesus be so hospitable with no home? Simple: Hospitality isn't about homes. The word Peter and Paul use in their letters is *philoxenos*, which simply means "love of strangers." It's a heart posture, not a house size. It's a disposition towards folks who are different from you, not an ability to channel the Barefoot Contessa.

One of the greatest displays of hospitality I ever experienced was my freshman year of college. I had just started attending a local church's version of a Community Group and still didn't really know the guys. One afternoon, I was walking to class and one of those guys called out to me from a nearby table. He got up, walked over, embraced me, and asked how I was doing. The exchange lasted less than five minutes, and eight years later I still rave about it to whoever I can corner. That's hospitality. Some dude I barely knew (who, for the record, is now one of my dearest friends) set aside his comfort and risked an awkward conversation to welcome me in. We weren't even *close* to either of our homes, and he didn't spend a dime on me. Wild!

Hospitality is not bound by any particular setting, income level, or schedule. Jesus went town to town, demographic to demographic, listening and loving without house or wealth. He showed us how to be

---

<sup>1</sup> 1 Peter 4:9

<sup>2</sup> Romans 12:13, 1 Timothy 5:10, Hebrews 13:2

<sup>3</sup> Deuteronomy 10:18-19, Psalm 146:9, Jeremiah 7:6-7, Zechariah 7:10, Malachai 3:5

<sup>4</sup> 1 Peter 1:1

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 8:20

hospitable to those around us. That certainly means our church family, our biological family, our roommates, our friends. But as the word itself alludes, the stranger, too.

No stranger was too strange for Jesus. He went where you're "not supposed to go," sat with those you're "not supposed to talk to," and offered himself; his time, his love, his life. The where, who and how didn't matter. Cool party? Great. Fancy house? Sure. Random well? Neat. A street? Fantastic.

The same heart of love and spirit of generosity that can welcome someone into your home, to enjoy a delicious meal around a cozy table, can go into a morning coffee meetup. Or a chat on a run in the park. Or a five minute phone call. We are disciples of Jesus Christ, not Joanna Gaines.

Are we seeking out strangers to befriend? Are we looking past age, race, marital status, voting record, and seeing fellow image bearers, fearfully and wonderfully made by the same loving Father, worthy of dignity, respect, and companionship? Great; that's true hospitality. Now you can get creative about how you show those strangers the love you learned from Christ.

We were once strangers, and the homeless Son of Man welcomed us in. When we do the same, we find ourselves moving away from self-centered worshippers of comfort and towards others-focused worshippers of Jesus.