

THE RADICAL NATURE OF BIBLICAL HOSPITALITY

OCTOBER 8, 2014, by Brad Brisco



What exactly is biblical hospitality? A good place to start is to consider the meaning of the word in Scripture. In the New Testament, the Greek word for “hospitality” is *philoxenia*, which is a combination of two words: *phileo* (love) and *xenos* (stranger). It

literally means “love of stranger.” There are several implications to this definition. First, in order to love the stranger and open our homes effectively, we need to expand our view of hospitality. Jesus challenges us to extend our circle beyond friends and relatives to include those in need:

When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you.”
(Luke 14:12)

Notice that the practice of genuine, biblical hospitality is distinct from entertaining because it reaches out to those who cannot reciprocate. Jesus tells us to invite those who can’t pay us back. In other words, invite those who are in need. Often when we invite friends into our homes for dinner there is an expectation that next time they will return the favor and have us over to their house. But the point of this passage is that customary “payback” hospitality is of no merit to God. As Darrell Bock puts it, “The best hospitality is that which is given, not exchange.”

A second important aspect of biblical hospitality is the understanding that strangers are not only people we do not know, but in a strict sense, strangers are those who are disconnected from basic relationships. So hospitality is not only about creating physical

environments that are welcoming to others; it is also about the posture we take toward human relationships in general.

How many people do we know in our neighborhood who are living lives severed from basic relationships? Hospitality involves cultivating connections with those disconnected people. It encompasses a willingness to listen well to those who rarely have a voice. It is about turning our lives toward the other, welcoming them into a relationship with us, but also inviting them into our network of relationships. Christine Pohl remarks on this broader understanding of hospitality:

When we offer hospitality to strangers, we welcome them into a place to which we are somehow connected—a space that has meaning and value to us. This is often our home, but it also includes church, community, nation, and various other institutions. In hospitality, the stranger is welcomed into a safe, personal, and comfortable place, a place of respect and acceptance and friendship. Even if only briefly, the stranger is included in a life-giving and life-sustaining network of relationships. Such welcome involves attentive listening and mutual sharing of lives and life stories. It requires an openness of heart, a willingness to make one's life visible to others, and a generosity of time and resources.

{Here is the story of J., as told by Don Gilbert: J. is a young African American woman in her 20's. She has two children, ages 7 and 3. She works with one of our adopted daughters who lives in our house. J. asked to be disciple, and our "play daughter" said yes. So, J. has been to our house three times for life on life discipleship. The children come and we keep them occupied so the discipleship time can have some peace and quiet. On the last visit, we asked J. and the kids to stay for dinner. When we finished the meal prayer which included prayer for J., she looked up in tears. She told us she has never felt so loved by strangers. We have accepted her, loved on her children, and invited her into our home with judgment or conditions. She told us she has never had this happen to her}

Hospitality is a practice that "asks us to do what in the world's eyes might seem inconsequential but from the perspective of the gospel is a manifestation of God's kingdom." Looking back I now see that was exactly what Jamesha experienced around that kitchen table that evening: a manifestation of God's kingdom. She was being invited into our family.

***Text Adapted from [The Missional Quest](#) by Brad Brisco
{The Story inserted in the text is from the Gilbert family}***