

## Biblical Hospitality

Many of us are in the ministry of sheltering those who have found themselves homeless. We are following the command to care for the poor through providing for physical needs. Our assignment goes much deeper. Much more than providing for the physical need is the command to love. Meeting physical needs without love is useless (1 Corinthians 13:3). Hospitality is a demonstration of your love for your client.

God went to great lengths in the early Hebrew times to instruct His people to be hospitable. It became a way of life for them, looking out for the needs of the stranger among them. It gives us pause to see that the practice of hospitality was a way of bringing others into relationship with Him.

In following the example set before us by Jesus, we learn the value of welcoming. Hospitality can be defined as the practice of making the other person feel welcomed. Our clients are experientially trained to pick up on cues of the behavior and body language of those who come to serve them. Respect and acceptance are both hidden signs of hospitality the client evaluates.

Isaiah reminds us of God's reputation in Isaiah 25:4 (NIV). "You have been a refuge for the poor, a refuge for the needy in their distress, a shelter from the storm, and a shade from the heat." We have the opportunity to represent Him as we provide a refuge for those entering our doors. In order to understand the magnitude of what being a refuge means, start with understanding how God is a refuge for you. David frequently thanked God for refuge. "For you have been my **refuge**, a **strong tower** against the foe" (Psalm 61:2-3). Jeremiah understood refuge also. "O LORD, my **strength** and my **fortress**, my **refuge** in time of distress" (Jeremiah 16:19(NIV)). Built into this provision is the sense of safety from the storms of life. Hospitality would indicate that I need to offer a place of security rather than a place of demand or ridicule. It is not enough that I treat the clients with love and concern, but I must also make a full attempt to protect them from the mistreatment from other clients. This raises the bar several notches and gives me motivation for maintaining a secure place.

Most Rescue Missions rely on chapels to share the Gospel. You might want to ask those who have found the Lord at the Mission what really was the motivation for seeking the Lord. Many will tell you what first opened their heart to consider Jesus was when they saw Him in the Mission staff. Hospitality allows us to show the effects of the Gospel in our own lives. Scripture says repeatedly, Truth is shared in love.

Why are we sometimes tempted to put hospitality on the back burner? We are too busy to be nice? We might give people the wrong impression, and they will want to take advantage of our pleasantness? We have had a hard day ourselves, and we deserve a little appreciation. They are hateful, and they do not deserve my care. I need to give to others what they are handing me. Yield not to temptation! No wonder Peter admonished us in 1 Peter 4:9 (ESV), "Show hospitality to one another without grumbling." Turn the moment into gratitude that God has considered you worthy to care for His creation in their lowest point.

Perhaps the great lesson for us as we attempt to obey the command to “Practice hospitality,” Romans 12:13, is that such practice requires that we also obey Philippians 2:3, doing nothing from selfishness or conceit but humbly regarding others as more important than ourselves.

People want to know how much you care before they care how much you know.