

**A Culture of Integration**  
**Text: 2 Corinthians 5:17-21**  
**5.20.18**



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**Reflection Questions for Personal Use or in a Group Context...** (please consider the teaching notes prior to consideration of the reflection questions)

You will find attached the entire **DESIRE** values offering. Perhaps this will help provide a more cohesive and comprehensive view of the values which are supporting and motivating our vision, as a church.

*“What images are created for you, mentally, when you hear the word ‘hospitality’? Do you know someone you would consider to be ‘hospitable’? What are some of the qualities they demonstrate?”*

*“Has anyone shown up in your life unexpectedly, as of late? What was your initial response: risky involvement or fearful retreat?”*

*“As you consider extending hospitality to another, is there a way that you might make the encounter more personal and less transactional?”*

*“What evidence is there in my life that I am spacious and welcoming? Are there unhealthy assumptions and prejudices I might need to address and abandon in order to better receive others for /with Jesus?”*

*“How can I use the resources available to me (home, fridge, bedroom) to make others feel as if they belong; that they are not alienated or estranged?”*

*“How might you be in need of hospitality? In need of a place, with God and with another?”*

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**Teaching Notes...**

**Integration** | *We are a people who are committed to seeing, honoring, and welcoming the “stranger” in ways which encourage healthy inter-dependence and compel others to participate in transformative community.*

**“Reconciliation” and “Hospitality”**

[Exodus 22:21; Romans 12:9-13; Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 1:20-22; 1 Timothy 3:2; Hebrews 13:1-2]

There are some basic themes interwoven throughout the story: **1)** historically, God has been incredibly consistent and patient (faithfulness), **2)** humanity’s fatal declaration, *“I don’t trust you anymore”*, has had devastating consequences on all of our lives. It has left us disconnected and disoriented--- from God and each other, **3)** God dreams of ‘repentance’; he is not willing to sit idly by and watch his beloved humanity self-destruct.

**“reconcile”** (Gr.)- *to bring back a former state of harmony. Restoring what once was but is currently in a state of dissonance or conflict*

We are introduced to the hospitality of God in the creation story. God prepares the space most conducive to healthy relationships, physically (Eden- “delight”), emotionally (nakedness), relationally (collaboration), meaningfully (stewarding the garden), spiritually (long walks in the garden).

Now, as soon as we hear the word, “hospitality”, we immediately assume we know what that means. After all, we have an entire industry and career path designated toward just such efforts. You can earn your “degree” in it.

**Hospitality**, in the original language, means, *“love of the stranger”* [xenos (zee-nos) *“stranger; foreigner, alien(ated); without the knowledge of, without a share in”*

**“Strangers”--- people without a place.**

To be without place is to be detached from life-sustaining relationships: family, significant friendships, a faith community.

So, when we think of the *“stranger”*, we think not necessarily in terms of someone who doesn’t speak our language or comes from a radically different ethnic back-story, but we think about ***the one who is yet to be known. The one with whom we feel no share; the one for whom we feel no responsibility. The one who feels disconnected. The one in need of welcome.***

**If I could pick a word that best describes Jesus’ life and mission, it would be, “welcoming”.**

If you're looking for ideas for a festive table-scape or "etiquette tips" for entertaining, Martha Stewart or "Pinterest", is your best bet. But, if you are looking for an example of hospitality, Jesus embodies it most beautifully.

Hospitality is the lens through which we are able to understand much of Jesus' teaching on the Kingdom.

In the ancient Near East, hospitality was considered a sacred obligation. Given the extreme climate and social conditions, one thing worked in your favor: anyone or any home you approached would gladly provide you with food, water, and shelter.

To accept someone's offer of hospitality meant that you trusted them. As long as you were "at their table", so to speak, they were bound to protect you.

Table not only represented protection, but peace. It signified that the relationship had been reconciled; where there was once distance and animosity, there was now restoration and a place to belong.

Now, think about **Psalm 23**, in light of those cultural implications. God was like a divine host, sheltering him and protecting him; inviting him to eat at his table.

In the first century, there were rules for what you could eat, with whom you could eat, and where you should sit while you were eating. Jesus was notorious for his objectionable 'table manners'. But, his choice of dinner partners was not just a social courtesy, but a profound metaphor for the peace that God desired to bring.

### **I suppose that in order to be a good host, you have to see yourself as a "stranger".**

*Leviticus 19:33-34 "Do not take advantage of foreigners who live among you in your land. Treat them like native-born Israelites and love them as you love yourself. Remember, that you were once foreigners living in the land of Egypt. I am the LORD your God."*

God anchors their understanding of hospitality in their own story of alienation and welcome; that they were the stranger, they were the ones in need of welcome, and God had brought them in, extended care and provision, and made a place for them in his community.

*"In those days you were living apart from Christ. You were excluded from citizenship among the people of Israel, and you did not know the covenant promises God had made to them. You lived in this world without God and without hope. But now you have been united with Christ Jesus. Once you were far away from God, but now you have been brought near to him through the blood of Christ."* Ephesians 2:12-13

### **Hospitality is not a program or a directive. It is a culture.**

Strangers are not simply people with whom we are yet to be acquainted. They are the lonely, the isolated, the marginalized... the hurting that we “do” know.

In our context, we need to understand that there are very few people in our lives who are not 'strangers' in one way or another. We have “shares” and “likes” and “blocks” and “unfollows”. We are able to very strategically determine the frequency and level of our interactions. We get to choose who “remains” estranged.

Hospitality is not, first, an act of dutiful-service, but an expression of gratitude. It is a means of recognizing all of the ways in which God has made room for and welcomed us which becomes imbedded in the ways that we are ‘with’ one another.

Hospitality is not a specialized spiritual gift that only a few people possess. It requires no special skill or advanced degree. While it's true that some may be 'better' at hospitality than others, everyone has a stake in it. “Practice hospitality” (Romans 12:13). We're just not good at it.

### **Most often, the most significant need we have is not charity, but hospitality.**

Hospitality to the stranger is almost easier because we expect them to remain just that: “strangers”. I can toss some money at you and wish you well, but I won't have to think about how I might be called upon to continue to make space for you in my already over-crowded life.

Charity says, “Tell me what you need?”. Hospitality says, “Tell me your story.”

### **When we practice hospitality, we offer people, first, a place with us, so that they might find their place with God.**

*“I was a stranger and you invited me in...”* Matthew 25. **“What does this say about the ways in which Jesus would define/identify his followers?”**

If it's God's kindness that leads people toward repentance (Romans 2), it's our kindness that leads them toward God.

### **There's nothing abstract about hospitality.**

Physical space: welcoming environment; wash sheets or defrost chickens; ready an extra bedroom to be shared.

Social space: people with names and faces and experiences show up on our calendars.

Emotional space: honesty; receptivity; non-judgment. We let others in. We let ourselves out.

Spiritual space: it somehow allows room for 'below the waterline' kinds of dialogue.

**Faith is never really healthy if it is not hospitable.**

Hospitality is what keeps community from becoming septic. No matter how close our community might be/become, there must always remain penetrable/permeable space.

Hospitality does not seek to offer ultimatums, but alternatives. Hospitality does not have the power, in and of itself, to cure or correct, but it makes possible the opportunity to choose something less self-destructive and healthier and offering Jesus in ways that make our choice for him the most reasonable one available.

**In hospitality, we seek not to offer a list of irrefutable facts, but the truth of lives which reflect the way of Jesus.**

The entire Christian life can be seen through the grid of Incarnation and Hospitality. In reality, this was the early follower's primary method of evangelism.

'**Incarnation**'| the act of entering into the world of another.

'**Hospitality**'| the act of inviting other people into our world.

**I suppose the only thing riskier than hospitality is the world we will experience without it.**

**Discovery:** We are a people who are being informed and formed by the biblical narrative and who are developing both a strong sense of identity (*who* we are), and a deep sense of purpose (*why* we are) within the Story of a loving and faithful God.

***“Revelation” and “Incarnation”***

*“... this is the way; walk in it.”* Isaiah 30:21

[Deuteronomy 29:29; John 20:30-31; Psalm 119:15-16; 2 Timothy 3:16-17, 2 Peter 1:20-21]

**Encounter:** We are a people who intentionally make ourselves *“present to”* and *“present for”* God in order that we might know him and respond in obedience to his loving initiatives.

***“Glory” and “Worship”***

*“Honor the LORD for the glory of his name. Worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness.”* Psalm 29:2

[Genesis 3:8; Exodus 19:3; Isaiah 6:1-8; Jeremiah 29:13-14; Matthew 28:17; Mark 5:6]

**Surrender:** We are a people who are learning to trust in God’s goodness and his good intentions for us and who are courageously and voluntarily living into his will for us.

***“Truth” and “Repentance”***

*“From then on, Jesus began to tell people, ‘Turn to God and change the way you think and act, because the Kingdom of heaven is near.’”* Matthew 4:17

[Isaiah 30:15; Jeremiah 31:19; Matthew 3:8; Mark 1:15; Romans 2:4; 2 Corinthians 7:8-10]

**Integration:** We are a people who are committed to seeing, honoring, and welcoming the “stranger” in ways which encourage healthy inter-dependence and compel others to participate in transformative community.

***“Reconciliation” and “Hospitality”***

*“If anyone belongs to Christ, there is a new creation. The old things have gone; everything is made new!*

*So, we have been sent to speak for Christ...”* 2 Corinthians 5:17-21

[Exodus 22:21; Romans 12:9-13; Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 1:20-22; 1 Timothy 3:2; Hebrews 13:1-2]

**Restoration:** We are a people who share in God’s work of healing, renewing, and restoring the world so that it increasingly becomes a better reflection of the wholeness (“shalom”) for which it was created.

***“Justice” and “Generosity”***

*“... generously offer food to the hungry and meet the needs of the person in trouble; then your light will rise in the darkness, and your gloom become like noon.”* Isaiah 58:10

[Deuteronomy 15:7-8; Psalm 33:5; 112:5; Isaiah 40:29; 61:8; Micah 6:8; Luke 6:35-36; 2 Corinthians 9:11]

**Engagement:** We are a people who are authentically loving God and compassionately loving our ‘near ones’ in ways which validate our claims of faith in Jesus and compel others to find life in and through him.

***“Invitation” and “Reach”***

*“God did this so that people would seek him. Then perhaps they would reach out for him and find him.*

*They would find him even though he is not far from any of us.”* Acts 17:27

[John 3:16-18; Acts 10:39-43; 28:28-31; Romans 1:16-17; 1 Thessalonians 2:8; 1 Peter 2:12]