

Look at verse 13 - “Share with God’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.” How do we apply this in the faith community?

Is it an option/suggestion or something more integral to our living-out of the gospel? How?

**In Matthew 25:35** Jesus says, “I was a stranger, and you welcomed me.” How do we welcome the stranger?

*Pastor Marguerite Rourke notes that one kind of stranger among us is the new baby, often introduced to us through a service of infant dedication. “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.” Matt 18:5 How do we help this stranger feel at home among us?*

*Our usual infant dedication liturgy asks of the children: Will you be a friend to ....? Will you include her in your games? Will you mind her and keep her safe? Will you teach her all the things a little girl needs to know, that you older children know already?*

*And to the adults: Will you assist this family in every way possible in supporting, teaching, guiding, nurturing and loving this child until she takes her place in God’s family.. with you? These promises are about welcoming integrating and being hospitable.*

*And they apply to all who come, not just babies. Jesus told us that when we treat anyone with love and care, we are doing it to him, and his directions are not complicated: feed, clothe, give drink, welcome, visit, tend, comfort. We respond this way, not because of a legalistic sense that we must, but in response to the grace of God at work in us and in this person he already loves and forgives. Paul tells us “Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.” (Romans 15:7) Never “neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it” (Hebrews 13:2). It is a privilege to walk the Emmaus road with those who come to participate our shared journey of faith. We pray that their hearts will burn within them as they hear God’s Word and experience God’s Presence in our community.*

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## Spiritual Practices

### Practice Five



## Hospitality

**“Share with God’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.”**

*“Practice” means the repeated performance of a task or action regularly over time. A spiritual practice is exactly what the word suggests, a way to be deliberate about matters of the soul. But when we think of Spiritual Practices, we usually think of something inward, solitary, subjective. We don’t realise that the intensely practical virtues of serving others are also disciplines that benefit from deliberate and attentive practice.*

*“A godshaped life is a flourishing tree”*

Proverbs 11:28

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## HOSPITALITY IS SPIRITUAL

This resource was designed for individual study as well as group settings. It should take about 60 minutes. You may expand it by allowing further time for reflection and discussion. Participants will need a copy of this resource, a Bible, a pen, and paper. Allow time for participants to reflect on the questions before beginning discussion. If you break your larger group into small groups for discussion, limit these to three or four. Make sure there is time for the full group to hear a few thoughts from each of the small groups at the end of your time together.

Whether studying in a group or alone, begin and end with prayer.

*Hospitality is more than being warm and friendly to others. It is a transforming way of life that opens our hearts not only to see Christ in the other, but also to move us to make room, make ready, and be available to those in need.*

**Biblical Reflection:** Luke 10:38–42 and John 11:17–27.

Martha, sister of Mary, was more than just a short-order cook for Jesus and his companions when they passed through Bethany. Jesus and Martha were friends. During the years that Martha opened her home to him, Jesus was teaching Martha how to trust in him. The death and raising of her brother Lazarus was the ultimate test. Martha learned how to put the cooking, cleaning, and serving aside. She moved from being a woman too busy to talk with Jesus to one transformed by his message.

Read the two stories and consider:

**Can you recall a time when you spent more time preparing for a guest than you spent actually being present with that guest?**

**Ponder the phrase Jesus used in Luke 10: 41f “You are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed.....”. What might Jesus have meant?**

**What keeps you too busy to sit and talk with Jesus?**

### *Being Available*

This is the final step in the process. Making room and making ready for the other are only preparation for our guest’s arrival, without being available for the action. It is time to be available. It is possible to say “Yes” and not move. Taking action is essential to hospitality. But recall from Martha’s example that being available is not about being busy. Being available is being fully present and engaged. with the other.

**Biblical Reflection:** Romans 12:9 - 21

Paul’s letter to the Romans gives powerful directives to use love to shape their actions. Hospitality, like love, is best practised in community. Because hospitality is a spiritual gift and practice, it is not an isolated action. It is how the body of Christ works together to respond to the physical need(s) of the other, and also to go broader in love.

Read Romans 12:9–21

## **Biblical Reflection:** 2 Kings 4:8–17.

The Shunamite woman is described as well-to-do. She not only makes a physical room for Elisha, but in doing so without any selfish motives, provided God the opportunity to bless her beyond anything she could imagine.

Read the story and consider:

**How did the woman know what and who to prepare for?**

**For what or whom are you making room?**

**Ponder the question Elisha asked the woman in verse 13 “...what may be done for you?”**

## *Making Ready*

To make ready is more than physically preparing for guests. The process continues with a willing and transformed heart ready to serve the other. Now our mental checklist contains new questions that guide us to the heart of the guest: Who is our guest? How are we connected? What are their needs? What more should we do to show hospitality? Have we properly prepared?

Hosts can end up disappointed if they fail to ask themselves these questions and find out later that their hospitality was received with a less-than-desirable response. Hospitality is an age-old relationship-builder. But a large part of making ready is discerning how hospitality is best offered. Think about your guest's age, (they may need a downstairs room) diet (they may have specific needs), noise (they may appreciate conversation, but also if very tired may just need to blob out, and professional role (they may need internet access).

Hospitality is not synonymous with charity—with “helping the less fortunate.” Compassion and empathy are important, but they are draining and can only sustain hospitality for a short time. Hospitality is a mutual exchange and the work of the Holy Spirit. We must also be ready to receive the gifts our guest has to offer..



## *Introduction*

Believers are a Welcoming People. From ancient Judaism to present day Christian faith, we have been called to welcome. Extending food and shelter, warmth and generosity to others are a bright thread running through the tapestry of the Scriptures. The practice of hospitality is commanded in the Torah, modelled in the life and values of Jesus, and finetuned in monastic traditions like the Rule of Saint Benedict. Practice of this virtue is not confined to Christians. Many cultures round the globe find in “table fellowship” the opportunity to welcome and integrate strangers. One Himalayan tribal leader told Greg Mortenson, author of *Stones into Schools*:

*“...with the first cup of tea, we welcome a stranger.  
The second cup brings him into the relationship of friend.  
And with the third cup of tea, he is part of the family.”*

Our commitment to hospitality is traditionally traced to Abraham, as he welcomed the three angelic visitors who would change his life forever. (Genesis 18:1–15) But in fact it was God who set the precedent for hospitality, welcoming our first parents into the beautiful garden and providing for their every need. And maybe Noah is also an earlier model for hospitality, as he welcomed all manner of passengers onto that ark!

Jesus' hospitality is characterised by the same lavish generosity that we observe in Abraham's example. But Jesus' hospitality was also expressed in his willingness to be tarnished by those he associated with, his readiness to approach the unwelcome element in his society. Jesus practiced table fellowship - including his Last Supper - in anticipation of the completion of God's purposes, the coming eschatological banquet in which people of all races and classes would be welcome.



## Hospitality at Home and Aways

The dictionary defines hospitality as:

1. the friendly reception and treatment of guests or strangers.
2. the quality or disposition of receiving and treating guests and strangers in a warm, friendly, generous way.

**Too big an ask?** In these days of Home Makeovers and Masterchef contests, we can feel the pressure to be fabulous hosts. A commercial view of hospitality has seeped into our attitudes about hospitality and is expressed in our actions.

**Too limited a perception?** As disciples of Jesus Christ, too often we have limited the practice of hospitality to hosting fellowship hour, welcoming visitors to worship, and serving meals. What's more, hospitality has usually been assigned to the women of the congregation.

When these cultural practices become entrenched without thought or examining why and how, hospitality can erode into a churchy form of social entertainment - we get caught up in a wedding-planner mentality, where the host is busy coordinating the colours of the napkins and liaising with the caterer (unless, like Bree Hodge, she is a blue ribbon chef herself!)

In this sort of social entertaining, the focus is on the host. She prepares. She puts her best foot forward to make a good impression. Only when everything is just right do the perfect people come together for the perfect event. The host controls who comes, what is shared, and when. Among all the pressures on the host to arrange everything perfectly, the needs of the guests are least important.

Let's look now at another definition of hospitality:

1. a spiritual gift.
2. the act of making room, making ready, and being available for the needs of others.
3. the spiritual practice that calls the disciple to see Christ in the other.

For Jesus and those who follow him, hospitality is a daily practice that transforms and opens the heart. Once Jesus' first disciples got over the shock of preparing a quick meal for 5,000 or allowing kids into the VIP section to see Jesus, they discovered that hospitality meant more than being warm and friendly (See Matthew 14:13-21; Luke 18:15-17).

Hospitality changes our hearts and actions so that we are available to meet the needs of others.

Practising hospitality with this understanding shifts the focus from the host who is in control, to the Holy Spirit who guides us as willing partners ready to serve. When disciples embody spiritual hospitality, the pressure to be perfect is lifted and the focus shifts to the Holy Spirit, who transforms both guest and host. This transformation gives a new image to hospitality, moving beyond the traditional images of serving in church kitchens and basements (which, sadly, so often come with a lack of joy or mindfulness on the server's part).

Exploring this definition of hospitality through Scripture will provide examples of this spiritual practice and offer new ways of thinking and acting.

### A Three Step Process:

Hospitality is more than being warm and friendly to others as you choose. It is a transforming way of life that opens the heart of the disciple to not only see Christ in the other but propels them to **make room, make ready, and be available** for those in need. Ultimately, this daily practice of Jesus that transformed and opened the hearts of his disciples can shift our attitudes and actions in the direction of the needs of the other. Changing the heart can occur with each encounter and every act of hospitality. Although here it is described in steps - making room, making ready, and being available - it is normally a seamless action that happens unconsciously, like breathing.

### 1. Making Room

To make room is more than emptying a dresser drawer so the guest has a place to put their things. Hospitality begins with the host making room mentally, emotionally, and spiritually for the other. One way of doing this is to consciously examine ourselves for any internal agendas or personal motives. The mental checklist includes a scan of one's feelings—joy, sorrow, fear, love, hate, anxiety—and how conscious the self is of those feelings. Then we consider how those might affect our experience with the guest.

Once we've gone through this checklist, the next step is making a spiritual connection—drawing a connection between ourselves and the work of the Holy Spirit. In this step, the Holy Spirit does the work of opening and transforming the heart, making space for the other. The host or hosts are now ready to give over the room or the time to the other, for as long as she or he needs it.