

## 1 Peter 4:7-10

### Introduction

At our Church Weekend we launched our Year of Hospitality, and last week we began to think about what hospitality is.

We saw that it flows from love. The Christian life is about learning to live downstream from God's love. If we're Christians, his love flows over us continually. And it should flow out from us to others. Hospitality is one expression of that.

We saw that hospitality is inherently personal. There's no "one-size-fits-all" approach. It doesn't always mean a dinner party. It could take any number of forms, and it thrives when it is individually tailored to people's needs.

And we saw that hospitality deepens our family ties. Opening our homes to one another is one way God has given us to share our lives together and learn to be family.

And if we've grasped all of that, then what I'm about to say this week will seem pretty obvious. It flows out of what I said last week.

There are many people in the church who already offer hospitality on a regular basis. I'm delighted that others have told me that they want to give it a go. So here are just a few more thoughts to help us.

And our first point is that hospitality is not a performance. That's our first heading.

### Hospitality is not a performance

The letter we looked at last week was written by the apostle Paul. The letter we're looking at this week was written by the apostle Peter. Two different authors, but they both give the same instruction to practise hospitality. Clearly, hospitality was important in the early church. And as with Paul, Peter's instruction follows an instruction to love one another. It reminds us again that hospitality flows from love.

Look at verse 8. **Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.**

We do things without grumbling when we do them willingly and gladly and without any pressure. We grumble when we do things we don't want to do, or when we feel under pressure when we're doing them. So while it may be obvious, I think it's important to be clear that hospitality is not about putting on a show. And we need to beware of our pride holding us back.

Perhaps you've seen shows on TV, in which contestants take it in turns to host each other and then give scores out of ten. When they each arrive, the house looks like a luxurious showhouse. The dining room is set like a room in a Michelin-starred restaurant. And the food is painstakingly prepared with the right wine to match. It's all about getting the best score possible. I can't imagine anything more stressful. Of course, it makes good TV. But it's all based on the need to impress. And that's the difference between hospitality and entertaining. Hospitality flows from love whereas entertaining is rooted in pride. Of course, there's nothing wrong with pulling out all the stops if we want our guests to feel appreciated. And there are some in the church who are very good at doing that. But entertaining is different.

Entertaining is about wanting people to see the perfect me and being impressed. It's a bit like the perfectly posed photos that people post on social media. It's about presenting a flawless version of me, rather than the real version. It wants to show off my perfect home and my gourmet cooking. And it looks for praise and popularity in return. It takes a lot of effort. It brings with it a lot of pressure. And it's unsurprising, therefore, if we can't manage it very often.

Please be assured that that is nothing like what Peter has in mind when he tells us to offer hospitality in 1 Peter 4. He isn't putting a burden on us. He isn't asking us to be impressive and extravagant. He certainly isn't asking us to score each other out of ten. He's simply asking us to express love for one another.

Sam Allberry says about this passage:

Peter is not so much telling us to do a certain *kind of thing* but to be a certain *kind of person*: someone who is willing and eager to share life and home with others. *Sam Allberry; 7 Myths about Singleness*

Hospitality isn't about presenting a flawless version of myself that only serves to intimidate people. It's about letting them see the real me, opening my home, as imperfect as it may be, and sharing my life with them. Remember what we said last week: food is just an excuse for getting people together. And the house doesn't need to be immaculate. And that's true whatever form our hospitality takes, whether it's a dinner party or simply having someone over for coffee.

In her book, *Open Heart, Open Home*, Karen Mains tells the story of a time when that was brought home to her. One morning, rather than getting on with the housework as she had planned, she flopped on the sofa with a book. By the afternoon, she was still there, with cushions strewn around her. The house was a mess. Children's toys and discarded newspapers were scattered over the floor. The washing up still hadn't been done. And then someone rang the doorbell. It was someone from the church. She was horrified. But

she describes how she let go of her pride, welcomed the woman into her messy home, and was rewarded with her guest's response. "I used to think you were perfect," she said, "but now I think we can be friends!" (*Karen Main; Open Heart, Open Home*)

Hospitality is not about putting on a performance. It's not about impressing people with a flawless version of ourselves. It's about opening our homes, welcoming people in, and sharing our lives with them as friends. It's one way in which our friendships grow.

And secondly, it is sacrificial. That's our next heading: Hospitality is sacrificial.

### Hospitality is sacrificial

That may not sound like the greatest selling point. But it is true, nonetheless. And it's helpful to think about that if we are to accept that sacrifice willingly and without grumbling.

Peter says in the next verse in 1 Peter: **Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.**

Peter is reminding us here that God's goodness to us takes various forms. Whether it's the money in our bank account, the house we call home, the car we drive, the strength in our body or the skills and abilities we possess, they are all gifts of God's grace. And Peter reminds us that the gifts we have received from God have been given to us for the purpose of serving others: **Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others...**

Serving others doesn't simply mean doing nice things for them. It means using our gifts to encourage people spiritually. To offer hospitality is not simply to give people a nice time, although hopefully it includes that. It's to use our gifts in a way that encourages them somehow in their relationship with God. It's a chance to show our love for them as a brother or sister in Christ. It can also be a chance to talk about our faith together; to share our stories, our struggles and our joys.

The problem is that that's not how we tend to view the gifts God has given us. Speaking for myself, the idea of using God's gifts for my own personal pleasure seems far more attractive than using them for sacrificial service. And I suspect I'm not the only one.

Extending hospitality to others *is* sacrificial. It might mean giving up an evening in front of the telly. It can be hard work. There may be a financial cost if a meal's involved. It takes energy. And not just physical energy. Listening while people talk, sharing their burdens, can be emotionally draining. Hospitality *is* sacrificial.

But when it flows out of our experience of God's love, which is upstream for all of us, then it's a sacrifice that we will willingly embrace. After all, accepting sacrifice to extend God's love to others is simply to be like Christ.

Remember what Paul says in Galatians 2:20: **The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.**

Jesus has extended his love to us through the cross. He laid down his life so that we might join him at the greatest act of hospitality that will ever be seen; the heavenly wedding feast that awaits all his people at the end of history. It was costly. But he has loved us with a sacrificial love. And if we have experienced that love, then we will willingly love others in the same way. If we have experienced God's grace to us in Jesus, then we will want to extend that grace to others, even though it is costly.

But again, we need to caveat that carefully, because it will look different for each of us. None of us has the same capacity, and we need to be honest about what we can and can't do. If you struggle with long term illness, for example, or have a young baby at home, or are having to hold down two jobs, then please don't compare yourself with others. Don't put that pressure on yourself.

While we are all called to make sacrifices as we follow our Lord, we're not all called to make the same sacrifices. Peter isn't calling us all to serve in exactly the same way. We each have our own circumstances and our own gifts. And what Peter says is this: **Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.** He's simply calling us to be faithful stewards of what God has given us in whatever way is appropriate. And when we do that, we are using his gifts fruitfully.

Carolyn Lacey says this in her book *Extraordinary Hospitality*:

Sacrificial hospitality is hard – it's much easier to write about than it is to practice. But there is great joy in knowing we are engaging in work that is purposeful and fruitful. As I write, I'm thinking about members of my church family who are struggling to persevere in their faith. If my hospitality can encourage them to resist temptation, pursue holiness and grow in faith and love, then I will sacrifice my time and energy joyfully. I'm also think about my neighbours and friends who do not know Christ. If my hospitality can showcase his welcome and point them towards life, the joy I will experience in seeing them at the future feast surpasses any sacrifice I may make on their behalf. *Carolyn Lacey; Extraordinary Hospitality.*

Hospitality is sacrificial but it is purposeful and fruitful.

And finally, it is inclusive. That's our final heading: Hospitality is inclusive.

## Hospitality is inclusive

I think that is clear from the verses we've already considered, especially from Peter's instruction to **love each other deeply**.

That implies more than just inviting our friends round for a meal or hanging out with people we can relax with. It implies sharing our lives with everyone, including those we may seem to have little in common with.

The writer to the Hebrews even includes people we don't know yet. He says this: **Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters. Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.** (Hebrews 13:2)

He's referring to an incident in the Old Testament when Abraham offered a meal to some visitors to refresh them on their journey, not realising that they were the Lord and his angels.

When I was at an event at my son's school recently, one of the other parents boldly announced that, 'Strangers are just friends I haven't met yet.'

Well, he certainly got a few laughs. But I think that is a biblical way of thinking, certainly when it comes to offering hospitality. It isn't about spending time with an exclusive group of close friends. It's about building friendships throughout the church family, especially with people we don't yet know very well. It's then that our hospitality reflects the welcome that Jesus extends to all kinds of people.

For sure, his claim is an exclusive one.

He said, '**No one comes to the Father except through me.**' (John 14:6)

Peter said, '**Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.**' (Act 4:12)

There is only one way to be saved, and that is through repentance and faith in Jesus. His claim is an exclusive one.

But that one way of salvation is open to anyone regardless of who they are or where they're from. In that sense, it's wholly inclusive.

And that inclusivity is evident in how the Bible ends.

In the book of Revelation, John records a vision he saw. He says this (and when he refers to the Lamb, he's talking about Jesus):

**After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: 'Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.'** (Revelation 7:9-10)

God extends his hospitality to a diverse group of people. The invitation to come to Jesus to find life and salvation is for everyone. He welcomes all kinds of people into his family, through repentance and faith.

And you and I can have the joy of reflecting *that* welcome as we extend hospitality to one another in all our diversity.

Our hospitality truly flows from God's love when we extend it beyond our close circle of friends.

## Conclusion

Well, we've had just two sermons on hospitality. There's plenty more that could be said. But I hope it's been helpful, particularly for those who are feeling nervous about the whole idea or unclear what it involves. Please do ask me if you have any questions. But please do also consider signing up for our Year of Hospitality. Just follow the QR code in the logo or sign up through our website. It would be great to get that underway.

Let's pray.

Loving Father, thank you for your grace to us in Christ and for the many gifts you have given us. Please help us to be faithful stewards of those gifts and to use them to serve others. Please help us to be a church in which we increasingly open our homes and share our lives with one another. And as we do that, please would your love abound among us. We ask it in the name of Jesus. Amen.