



The kitchen has been called “the heart of a home.” What a fitting title for a room where we welcome others with a satisfying meal or a simple cup of coffee. It’s interesting, we call the kitchen the heart of a home because studies have shown that the kitchen is one of the dirtiest places in the home! Kitchens can be cluttered with appliances on the counter, dishes in the sink, and a messy floor from the latest baking project. Let’s not even begin to think about what is laying behind the fridge or oven...yuck!

On the other hand, a kitchen is also what sells a home. One of the first things a person wants to see when looking at a potential home to purchase is the kitchen. People are looking to see if the upgraded countertops will be sufficient for the guests they plan on entertaining or if there will be adequate space for cooking the Thanksgiving meal. People are curious if the kitchen will provide ample room for conversations with a friend from college. Finally, they might be wondering if the kids will be bumping into each other as they prepare for school in the morning.

Thinking about your kitchen, would you consider your kitchen more cluttered or inviting? Do you think there is ample room to have a meaningful conversation? If guests were coming over this afternoon, is your kitchen presentable or would you feel like you need to leave this instant to start cleaning? My guess is many of us would prefer others to not see our kitchen. Forget about the dishes in the sink or the coffee stains on the counter that desperately needs to be scrubbed; let’s enter the kitchen.

Open your Bible to Deuteronomy 24 as we talk about hospitality flowing from the heart of our home. In his book *Going Solo*, sociologist Eric Klinenberg noted the following statistics about the new trend of living alone: 32 million Americans live alone, representing 28 percent of all households. In prosperous American cities—Atlanta, Denver, Seattle, San Francisco and Minneapolis—40 percent or more of all households contain a single occupant. Five million people in the United States between the ages of 18 and 34 live alone, 10 times more than in 1950. The largest category of single people is the middle-aged group, ages 35–64. These stats are revealing about our culture and remind us why the conversation about Biblical hospitality is extremely important.

Hospitable Preparations

The Old Testament is the perfect place to begin our study of hospitality as we see how close this topic is to the heart of God.

“Do not deprive the foreigner or the fatherless of justice, or take the cloak of the widow as a pledge. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you from there. That is why I command you to do this” (Deuteronomy 24:17–18).

The Israelites are in a transitional period in their lives. They are preparing to enter the Promised Land. They have been wandering in the desert for almost 40 years. God is speaking through Moses to prepare them for their new inheritance. As he speaks, we see mention of three specific groups of people the Israelites are to favor. We’re going to focus on showing hospitality to three different groups of people—people who can be marginalized.

God commands Israel not to deprive the foreigner or fatherless of justice. The word used for “deprive” in the original language is “הִטָּה” (nth). The word is often translated “to stretch out” or “spread out.” It’s understandable to consider that when someone is deprived they are stretched out, or as we might say, stretched thin. We read a distinct command not to deprive them or “stretch them thin” when it comes to justice. The command starts with foreigners and the fatherless and moves on to widows. The widow was especially vulnerable, prone no doubt to constant indebtedness. In such circumstances not even her cloak could be taken as a pledge, suggesting that loans to her were to be made without guarantee of any kind. This circumstance really would become more a gift than a loan because her opportunities for repayment would be extremely limited, depending on her age and physical capacity.

This command is based on God reminding Israel about the slavery in which they were once held captive. God is reminding them of His mighty saving power. The way they were commanded to act is a direct reflection of the generosity God once showed in their lives. We come face to face with the fact that hospitality is what God is referring to here. To say it differently would be to say: extraordinary hospitality flows from God.

We are not just looking at hospitality, but extraordinary hospitality. What makes hospitality such a big deal for Israel in the Old Testament? The bottom line is this: God wanted His people to represent Him well. God is the God of the stranger, fatherless, outcast, widow and the hurting. He wanted His people to reflect Him. Let’s see what extraordinary hospitality looks like to foreigners, orphans and widows in Deuteronomy 22.

Extraordinary Hospitality to Foreigners

The first group we're going to look at is foreigners. Israel was preparing to possess a new land. Scripture tells us there were foreigners traveling with them and there were bound to be foreigners residing in the new land. Since God is a loving, compassionate God, He wanted to be certain their actions would reflect His character.

"When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands" (v. 19).

The day Israel entered the Promised Land, they would stop eating manna from heaven and begin harvesting from the land. This would include harvesting grain from their own fields. Grain would have been one of the primary substances in their diet. The first thing God asks of them is to leave some grain for these marginalized groups of people.

In Ruth 2 we find an example of a foreigner, in Israel, who was in desperate need of grain. Ruth came to Israel with her mother-in-law Naomi. When it was time for the harvest, Ruth went out and began gathering grain in the fields of a close relative, Boaz. Ruth had nothing to offer. She had just come to Israel with Naomi. She was a foreigner with no job, no money to offer, and she needed hospitality extended to her. She followed Naomi's instructions and went out early in the morning to gather what little grain she could for them.

While she was working in the field, Boaz approached her and invited her to stay with his workers and continue gathering grain alongside them. Boaz instructed his workers not to lay a hand on her as she gathered, and went so far as to offer Ruth water from the jug to quench her thirst. This would have been a godsend to Ruth as she labored in the hot sun, but the extraordinary hospitality doesn't stop there! Boaz instructed the harvesters to leave full stocks on the ground; he offered her bread, and he gave her a meal of roasted grain. When she went home that evening to Naomi, the Bible tells us she brought back 30 pounds of grain with her, 30 pounds of grain freely given to her by Boaz!

The dictionary defines hospitality as "the friendly and generous reception and entertainment of guests, visitors, or strangers." Boaz was exceptionally friendly and generous to Ruth. Go back to Deuteronomy 24 and reread the verse. When we look at it again, we basically see that God is commanding the Israelites to be inefficient in their harvest. The harvesters are to intentionally leave behind eatable grain for those who are unable to support themselves. How can we help model what Boaz did and help a foreigner? We need to start with figuring out who the foreigners around us are. Another word for foreigner is "stranger." Are there ever strangers around you, people you don't know? Is the person sitting next to you this morning a stranger or a friend? If they are

a stranger or friend, you can model the extraordinary hospitality of God to them.

Verse 19 ends with a reciprocal benefit for showing hospitality. The hospitality shown is rewarded with a blessing from the Lord. I personally think Boaz would have been familiar with this text. Boaz was aware it was his responsibility to make sure his harvesters left grain for foreigners so they could gather food and support themselves with some sense of dignity. Boaz modeled extraordinary hospitality to Ruth during a difficult time in her life. Alternatively, Ruth accepted the hospitable gesture from Boaz. It was probably humbling, and maybe a little nerve-racking, for Ruth to accept the kindness of Boaz but she accepted it.

Extraordinary Hospitality to Orphans

The next group we're going to look at from the text are the fatherless, or what we more frequently call, orphans.

"When you beat the olives from your trees, do not go over the branches a second time. Leave what remains for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow" (v. 20).

Let's shift gears a minute and let me tell you about olives in the Mediterranean. You don't pick olives from the tree; you beat an olive tree and allow it to drop its valuable fruit. The olive tree is one of the most essential cultivated plants in Palestine. Since there are almost no olive trees in Mesopotamia and Egypt, olive oil became an important export product for Israel. When Israel inhabited the land, they would be the ones beating these trees and making olive oil in the coming years.

The second thing God is asking Israel to do is leave olives on the tree. God didn't want the Israelites to strip the trees bare, but to leave olives for the poor. The book of Proverbs reminds us of the importance of showing hospitality to the poor. **"Whoever oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God"** (Proverbs 14:31). Practically, it can be difficult to show hospitality to the fatherless. Nationwide there are almost half a million children currently in foster care. California currently has the largest population of children in foster care, just over 66,000.

If you've seen the movie *The Blind Side*, then you know that the Tuohy family opened their home to Michael Oher. After finding out that his mom was unable to care for him, they provided a room in their home, a car for him to use, and made his education a priority. Not only did they open their home to this man, they opened their lives! Leigh Anne Tuohy said this: "When someone comes into your life, like a Michael Oher, trust me when I tell you that you (the giver) will benefit much more than the receiver ever will." Their story is an inspiring example of extraordinary hospitality.

What would hospitality like this look like on the Peninsula? We need to remember that at its core hospitality is the opposite of

selfishness. Let me give you an example from the Benson home. Not this week but the week before, we had two people, at different times, sleeping on our couch. They weren't orphans, but they needed a place to lay their head for the night. One of our guests was a planned visit while the other texted my wife in the middle of the week to see if she could stay the night. It didn't stop there. We have a friend who's a young college student at Biola. This summer he's working down at Mount Hermon and we've invited him to spend any Saturday he wants with us. On his drive up he texted me to see if he could do his laundry at our home; you already know that we said "yes" to him.

I share this story not to boast but so that you can see I'm not asking you to do anything we're not willing to do. Seeing how extraordinary hospitality flows from God spurs us to be hospitable to those around us. Are you saying yes to the opportunities God has given you to extend hospitality? If His hospitality has impact you share it with others. I'm convinced God gives us opportunities to be hospitable all the time. The question becomes, How will we respond?

Extraordinary Hospitality to Widows

So far we've seen extraordinary hospitality shown to a foreigner and a fatherless young man. But God's word doesn't stop there; we have one more person God commanded the Israelites to show extraordinary hospitality to—widows.

"When you harvest the grapes in your vineyard, do not go over the vines again. Leave what remains for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow" (v. 21).

This is the third time God is asking Israel to be inefficient at harvest time, leaving grapes on the vine that will translate into provision for widows. Imagine what a welcome treat grapes would have been to the somewhat monotonous diet in Israel! Grapes are versatile, their purpose being threefold: they can be used for food, for raisins, or for wine making.

There can be a sense of helplessness in the life of a widow. It's no wonder that James wrote in the New Testament, *"Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world"* (James 1:27). Widows can range from a 25-year-old woman with two children who lost her husband to cancer all the way to an 85-year-old woman who lost her husband to congestive heart failure.

Jesus models caring for widows in the New Testament. In Luke 7:11-17 we find Jesus smack in the middle of a very moving scene. As He walks into the little town of Nain, out comes a funeral procession. There's likely an open coffin with the covered corpse of a young man. Leading the procession is a woman, and she's wailing. If you've seen Middle Eastern funerals, you know their grief isn't hidden. This woman has already buried her

husband, and now she must bury her son. What a painful situation she is in as the village shuffles behind her, united in grief.

When the Lord saw the mourning woman, *"his heart went out to her, and he said, 'Don't cry.'"* Isn't that wonderful? Jesus engages with the pain this widow is feeling. The Savior cares for this woman. Then Jesus went up and touched the coffin, and those carrying it stood still. The coffin-bearers are standing still, the village is standing still, and everyone is shocked. Then Jesus says something I've never seen done at a funeral. Jesus touches the bier, and he says, *"Young man, I say to you, get up."* Luke, in glorious understatement, writes, *"The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother."*

Jesus, our Lord and Savior, took His valuable time to care for this widow. This very well may be the best example of a generous and friendly reception of a stranger we've ever seen. Jesus didn't attempt to avoid the funeral procession. No, Jesus became directly involved in this widow's pain and provided the one thing she was longing for. This story is not to say that every widow will get her son back, but it's a great example of how Jesus was not only willing but available to show hospitality when the opportunity presented itself. This is a great New Testament story, but what does this look like on the Peninsula?

The first thing you have to know about showing extraordinary hospitality is this—it's going to take time. It's going to require us to free up our calendar, turn off our TV and set aside our iPhone for the afternoon. Hospitality can start with inviting a widow into your home for a cup of tea or a home cooked meal. It doesn't even have to be home cooked; it could be pizza. Maybe you're thinking of someone who you would want to invite into your kitchen but her physical condition won't allow her to get there. It's ok, you could make a meal and bring it to her home. You could sit in her kitchen and have wonderful conversation.

The point is friendly conversation and enjoying each other's company. Imagine where the conversation could lead and what kind of friendship could develop. Imagine the laughter you could enjoy sitting face to face with a wonderful person. If you don't know a widow, find an assisted living home and meet one! Feel free to leave room in your calendar this week and start creating space in your life for God to use your kitchen to show His love to others. Extraordinary hospitality flows from God to us and then to others.

Hospitality Reminder

Returning to our text in Deuteronomy we see that God employs repetition in His command.

"Remember that you were slaves in Egypt. That is why I command you to do this" (v. 22).

Repetition is something we can all use, a gentle reminder from our Lord to live a life of extraordinary hospitality. Romans 12:13

affirms this lifestyle of hospitality. Paul tells us to *“share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.”* The original Greek word used here for hospitality is φιλοξενία (philoxenia). It’s a combination of two words: love and stranger. At its root hospitality means “love of strangers.”

The practice of hospitality was ingrained in the Jewish people for centuries. It was a way of life, not an event. For the Old Testament Jews, hospitality was a sacred duty. It was unthinkable to refuse hospitality to a needy person. Unfortunately, they quickly forgot about this command. The hospitality we saw commanded in Deuteronomy and Romans is the same hospitality we can all practice. This morning we can pick this command back up and model the love of our Savior to those around us. This needs to become our mindset.

Let’s summarize what we studied. Remember Boaz? Hospitality is going to cost us something. As we practice hospitality on the Peninsula be prepared for the cost and get ready for the blessing to follow your obedience. Secondly, we learned from the Tuohy family that hospitality requires room. This is a great time to start thinking about creating room in your home to be hospitable. A side note on this application: if you wait until your home is perfectly ready to practice hospitality you never will. Stop waiting

for your home to be perfect and just start practicing hospitality. Finally, we saw how Jesus didn’t allow time constraints to hinder hospitality. Jesus was hospitable when hospitality was needed most. Jesus modeled creating space in our fast paced lives to be hospitable to others. Extraordinary hospitality flows from God to us and then to others.

Some of you might be thinking, “Neal, I don’t have the spiritual gift of hospitality, so I am off the hook.” It’s true, some Christians have the spiritual gift of hospitality. They are unbelievable at making people feel loved, cared for and welcomed. But the Bible tells all of us to practice hospitality whether we have the gift or not; it’s not an option. Hospitality is a practice for all people who call themselves a follower of Jesus. Extraordinary hospitality flows from God to us and then to others. As Christ followers we can model this kind of hospitality on the Peninsula. Start practicing extraordinary hospitality today. Who knows how it might change your life or the lives of those around you.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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Catalog No. 1401-9FC