



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 ages 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.
- The U.S. is not unique. In Paris, half of all households contain single people, and in Stockholm, the rate tops 60 percent.

Klinenberg noted when people can afford to live alone, more tend to do so. He also said that this trend spills over into families that do not live alone. He writes, "Those in large suburban homes often splinter into private rooms to be alone. The image of a modern family in a room together, each plugged into a separate reality, be it a smartphone, computer, video game or TV show has become a cultural cliché." According to Klineberg, "going solo" is largely a positive trend, but some social observers disagree. For instance, Mark T. Mitchell, a professor at Patrick Henry College cautions that this trend has some potential downsides. Mitchell writes:

*"There is an obvious attraction here. After all, this new way of living makes it possible to dramatically limit encounters with all but the people we choose to see. One can avoid the inconveniences of a difficult roommate or a less than perfect spouse. My time and space are my own and I need to share only when I choose to go out or let someone else in.*

*"[But] living alone can lead to a disposition that I am center of the universe. If I live alone, when I eat, sleep, brush my teeth, and exercise I must ask leave of no one and can do exactly as I please. I don't have to get up in the night to help a sick roommate or spouse, fetch a glass of water, or get an extra blanket to stave off the chills of fever. My schedule is my own and my life is arranged so that I need to defer to no one. Perhaps when God observed that it is not good for man to be alone, he was not referring merely to the fact that humans need companionship but that the temptation to focus exclusively on the self would increase exponentially in the absence of another person with whom to share space and time."<sup>1</sup>*

I have no problem with people living alone, in fact, it sounds pretty nice some days! But what does God think about this trend? Is it healthy? Is it good? Is it wise? Should the church care about this phenomenon? Should we? We are continuing our series, "Building a Home: One Room at a Time," and today we are in the kitchen considering hospitality. You may be wondering why we would spend an entire sermon on the subject of hospitality. I thought the same thing until I began to study the subject. The Bible says a lot about hospitality for many good reasons. It's been said that home is where the heart is, but for many people home is a dreadful word. Home is not a place many people look forward to visiting for the holidays or going after work.

We can feel this way even about the church. How is that we can see the same people week after week, smile, say a few words, but we don't really know each other? If the church is supposed to be a family, God's family, then why don't we know each others' pains, struggles, needs, joys, and failures, let alone your name? At home or at church, it's easy to live in isolation. It's a lot of work and a hassle to get to know people. Hospitality is a powerful weapon for breaking down these walls. But what does biblical hospitality look like? And who should we be practicing hospitality with? That's what we are going to reflect on this morning.

### **What is Biblical Hospitality?**

What do you think about first when you think about hospitality? Is it a nicely cooked meal that you've prepared for your friends, complete with beautiful table settings? Is it the mint on your pillow, freshly folded towels and the breakfast buffet at a boutique hotel? Is it all the party themed images you see on Pinterest? Those all may be expressions of hospitality but they don't get to the heart of it. Hospitality is not "entertaining." You can have people over to your home, throw a party, or serve a meal and not be hospitable. The goal of entertaining is to impress others. The emphasis is on good food and appearance. It's easy to become preoccupied or apologetic about messes. But the goal of hospitality is to serve others. Instead of looking good, you want Jesus to look good. The emphasis is on the hearts of those in your home. Messes humble you, but don't bother you. Author Trisha Wilkerson explains,

*"Entertaining says, 'I want to impress you with my beautiful home, my clever decorating, my gourmet cooking.' Hospitality, however, seeks to minister. It says, 'This home is not mine. It is truly a gift from my Master. I am his servant, and I use it as he desires.'"<sup>2</sup>*

Hospitality is not entertaining.

Romans 12:13 is more specific about 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 *philoxenia*. It’s a combination of two words—love and stranger. Hospitality means literally “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 Old Testament Jews, hospitality was also a sacred duty. God was viewed as their host. It was unthinkable to refuse hospitality to a needy person, because God wouldn’t. If a traveler or poor person came to your home it was expected that you care for them with food, lodging, and whatever they needed.

This practice was also common and expected within the New Testament church. In fact, the Lord encouraged his disciples to depend on hospitality during their missions (Matt. 10:11). If you think about it, without the church practicing hospitality, the spread of the Gospel would have been greatly slowed down. Christians are hospitable because God is hospitable. God welcomed us into his family through the blood of his Son Jesus. Hospitality is love for strangers and God showed us the way first. Hospitality then is a practical way to express our love for Jesus. Nancy DeMoss put it this way:

*“To be a Christian is not just to have our own personal relationship with God. To be a Christian is to be a part of a family. For the New Testament believers, that was a powerful concept. They had come out of all different kinds of backgrounds—slaves, free, Jews, Gentiles, men, women—but they had come to be related to each other, brothers and sisters in the family of God.*

*“So for those first Christians who were living in a pagan, hostile world that rejected Christ, this family was very important to them. They stuck together. They had to. Their survival depended upon it. They shared their material possessions. They met in homes. They ate meals together. They cared for each other’s widows. They showed hospitality to each other.”<sup>3</sup>*

What a beautiful picture of the early church. To be a part of the church is to be part of God’s family. That means we care for one another in many ways like we would care for our immediate family. Is that your view of the church? Or is it merely someplace you go on Sunday for an hour and fifteen minutes?

Apostle Peter understood that hospitality is not something that is easy to do; it doesn’t come naturally. In 1 Peter 4:9 he writes, ***“Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.”*** When you are hospitable, Peter says, do it with a glad heart. No one likes to feel like they are intruding on someone. This practice was so important because the early church met in homes. Can you imagine having people over to your home in the first century? Most have never heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ, some

are foreigners, some are very poor, some are strangers, and there you are worrying about communion wine spilling on your Persian carpets. There were no modern hotels or B&B’s in the ancient world. And inns had a bad reputation. So, to be hospitable was a practical way of expressing your love for God and your neighbor. Apostles, elders, pastors, and missionaries relied on hospitality to spread the Gospel across the world. This virtue was so important it was a required practice for an elder/overseer, ***“Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach”*** (1 Tim 3:2). Back then and today, you cannot be an elder without being hospitable.

I’ll be honest, when it comes to hospitality in my home, I’ve been known to grumble. My wife and I love being hospitable, but at times we differ on how that is supposed to look. When people come over for dinner, she cares deeply about how they will feel, how we can care and pray for them. The “pastor,” cares deeply about the house being clean! My bride would love to have people over almost every week; it’s one of her spiritual gifts. I enjoy having people over like once a month. This has been an area of conflict for us that we continue to work through. If you are like me, this is challenge stuff. If you are like my wife, you are saying “Amen, let’s be more hospitable!”

Peter reminds us all that hospitality is to be done “without grumbling.” That means it won’t always be easy or good timing. That means it really doesn’t matter if the house is clean or dirty. Back then, like today, homes were occupied by families and bringing in a traveling stranger for the night was not easy to embrace. But, the church exploded in growth because of this practice. People young and old, rich and poor felt loved, cared for and were brought into one single family, the family of God, the body of Christ. When the Bible talks about hospitality it says nothing of home decor, menu, or table settings. Hospitality is not just an event, it’s a lifestyle, intended to point others to God’s family.

Some of you might be thinking, “Well, 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 accepted. My wife has this gift. But the Bible tells us to practice hospitality whether we have the gift or not. It’s not an option. Hospitality is a practice for **all** followers of Jesus. The same is true with evangelism. Some have it as a spiritual gift but we all are commanded to share the Gospel with others whether you have the gift or not.

So those are some Biblical reasons why we should practice hospitality. The Bible also directs us to who should receive our hospitality. Namely, strangers, orphans, widows, and the poor. Let’s look briefly at each group.

## Who Should We be Hospitable To?

### Hospitality to strangers

Hebrews 13:1-2 says, *“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.”* The author of Hebrews commands us to keep loving one another (*philadelphia*). Love for one another truly is the hallmark of the Christian faith. We are then told to show hospitality to strangers. The writer is not saying you should be hospitable because you just might be hanging out with an angel. We should be hospitable because it pleases God. That is our motive.

How do you feel about having a stranger over to your home? It's a bit unnerving. Even unsafe! Obviously we should have discernment with who we invite over. What “strangers” have been absent from our homes and our churches? How about single people? How are you doing at inviting single people over? As a married couple, do you include them in the things that you do? To be a single Christian on the Peninsula can be very lonely. Next time you have a dinner party, invite some of your singles over. What about the stranger you just met at church today? When is the last time you said “Hey, why don't you and your family come over for lunch?” I hope and pray that our church is a church where that happens often. Where new people are getting included quickly into our CPC family. Where people who just moved into town are welcomed and loved on by us. I know we can all do better at this. Let's be more hospitable to strangers and in doing so you might be entertaining angels.

### Hospitality to orphans and widows

James 1:27 stretches our faith even more, *“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.”* According to James, religion is not about being a good moral person and going to church. Actually, James doesn't give us a clear definition of religion. Instead he challenges us to be a life changing influence in other peoples' lives. True faith shows itself in the love and care for orphans and widows. How are you doing at that? You might say, “Hey, not everyone can adopt a foster child like you Pastor.” And that's true, but most of us can sponsor a child through Compassion International. Do you know of anyone trying to adopt? I know of a few families right here at the North Campus. Maybe you can help them in practical ways as they seek to adopt.

Many of you were very hospitable to my family as we went through the adoption process with Brenden. You took our kids out for fun so Missy and I could go to court dates and meetings. Some of you gave us many of the things we needed to have a baby in our house again. I praise God for those of you who did that. You were hospitable and cared for an orphan. What about

widows? Maybe your family or your community group can bake cookies and take them to a local retirement home. Maybe you can invite your neighbor, who is a widow, over for dinner. We can't do everything, but we can all do something to care for the orphan and widow.

### Hospitality to the poor

Another area we are encouraged to practice hospitality is with the poor. In Matthew 25:34-36 Jesus says, *“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’* Jesus continued in verse 40, *“Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.”* Hospitality is a way we can honor and love God by meeting the practical needs of the poor. Proverbs 14:31 says, *“Whoever oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God.”*

Christianity is a faith of “open hands, open hearts, and open doors.” When you look at the message and life of Jesus, his heart for the poor is undeniable. Jesus often welcomed the poor and the needy. He served the outcast, the broken, the hurting, and the homeless. He practiced great hospitality to the poor and never once did he own a home. Alexander Strauch, in his book *The Commands of Hospitality* says, “Hospitality fleshes out love in a uniquely personal and sacrificial way. Through the ministry of hospitality, we share our most prized possessions. We share our family, our home, finances, food, privacy, and time. Indeed, we share our very lives. Unless we open the doors of our homes to one another, the reality of the local church as a close-knit family of loving brothers and sisters is only a theory. A cold, unfriendly church contradicts the gospel message.”

How are you doing in this area? How are you doing at offering hospitality to the stranger, orphan, widow, and poor? The point is practicing hospitality should extend beyond the comfort of our family and close friends. This is challenging for us all.

Pastor David Roper wrote a short article for *Our Daily Bread* in 2002 that I want to close with:

“I ate breakfast the other day with a man who 60 years ago sold newspapers and shined shoes on the streets of downtown Boise, Idaho. He told me about his life in those days and how much things have changed.

"What's changed the most?' I asked him. 'People,' he said. 'They don't care anymore.'

"As a case in point, he told me about his mother, who often fed hungry men who came to her house. Every day she prepared food for her family and then made several more meals because she knew homeless travelers would start to show up around mealtime. She had deep compassion for those who were in need. Once she asked a man how he happened to find his way to her door. 'Your address is written on all the boxcar walls,' he said."

I wish that type of compliment could be said of all of us. In the feeding of the multitude, Jesus gave us an example of what it means to care about the physical and spiritual needs of others (Mark 8:1-9).

It would be wonderful if our homes were known as places where hungry people could find bread. But more than that, we need to pray that our homes will be known as places where spiritually hungry men, women, and children will be loved, listened to, and given the bread of life.

As we live and work on the Peninsula, the reality is that we are all tired. We work very demanding jobs. If you have kids, you may be wondering how any of this is even possible. I don't want

you to leave here feeling you have more to do and more boxes to check off to be a good Christian. So let me encourage you to start simple. Pray and ask the Lord to help you. Just say, "Jesus, how can I, how can my family, have people into our home so that we can minister to them in some way?" Ask the Lord to show you an opportunity this week to start small. My bet is that he'll show you, maybe even today.

Hospitality is an incredible privilege to show the world what God is like. Hospitality is not just an event, it's a lifestyle, intended to point others to God's family.

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<sup>1</sup>Matt Woodley, managing editor, PreachingToday.com; sources: Eric Klinenberg, *Going Solo* (Penguin Press, 2012); Mark T. Mitchell, "Living Alone," Front Porch Republic (2-28-12). I posted 4-2-12.

<sup>2</sup>Trisha Wilkerson, Blog Post – *Practicing Biblical Hospitality*.

<sup>3</sup>*Revive Our Hearts* with Nancy Leigh DeMoss, [www.reviveourhearts.com](http://www.reviveourhearts.com).

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