

Hospitable The Character of the Christian Tim Challies

Today we continue our series on the character of the Christian. We are exploring how the various character qualifications of elders are actually God's calling on all Christians. While elders are meant to *exemplify* these traits, all Christians are to *exhibit* them. I want us to consider whether we are displaying these traits and to learn together how we can pray to have them in greater measure. Today we will look at what it means for an elder—and for every Christian—to be hospitable. We will also see why God elevates this trait to such high importance.

Paul tells Timothy, “an overseer must be...hospitable” (1 Timothy 3:2) and echoes this in his letter to Titus (Titus 1:8). The Greek word for “hospitable” (*philoxenon*) indicates a love for strangers. In the day before the Holiday Inn, Christians were expected to extend hospitality to other traveling believers or itinerant preachers. They were to feed them and to provide them a place to sleep apart from dirty, dangerous, and unsavory inns. The word is naturally expanded to include other forms of hospitality. But at heart, it indicates a willingness to invite others into your home for a short or extended stay.

Hospitality is a tangible, outward display of godly character.

Why is there such emphasis on this trait? Alexander Strauch explains by saying, “Hospitality is a concrete expression of Christian love and family life. It is an important biblical virtue. ... Giving oneself to the care of God's people means sharing one's life and home with others. An open home is a sign of an open heart and a loving, sacrificial, serving spirit. A lack of hospitality is a sure sign of selfish, lifeless, loveless Christianity.” Hospitality is a tangible, outward display of godly character.

An open home displays Christian love but it also enables it. Hospitality creates opportunities for relationship, for discipleship, and for evangelism. It creates a natural context for modeling marriage, parenting, and a host of Christian virtues. While we are to teach others what the Bible says, we are also to demonstrate what it says, and we do that by inviting people into our homes and into our lives.

Is it only elders who are called to share their lives and their resources by opening their homes? No, this call goes to all Christians. While the Old Testament law places great emphasis on caring for and protecting the sojourner, this care for strangers is made even more explicit in the New Testament. Peter writes to all Christians when he says “Show hospitality to one another without grumbling” (1 Peter 4:9) and Paul tells the whole congregation in Rome that they must “Seek to show hospitality” (Romans 12:13). The author of Hebrews says, “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares” (Hebrews 13:2). Paul instructed Timothy to extend the church's benevolence to a widow if she “has shown hospitality” (1 Timothy 5:9–10). Jesus taught that we will be judged on the basis of our hospitality, for when we love and welcome others we in fact love and welcome him (Matthew 25:35–40).

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Strauch concludes, “Hardly anything is more characteristic of Christian love than hospitality. Through the ministry of hospitality we share the things we value most: family, home, financial resources, food, privacy, and time. In other words, we share our lives.”

Self-Evaluation

So, how about you? Would others say that you are hospitable? Engage with these questions and be honest with yourself and with God:

- How many people from your church have you invited into your home for a meal? When was the last time someone stayed the night?
- Do others come to you when they need help, or do you give the impression that you don't want to be bothered?
- Is your family intentional about welcoming others into your home, even if they are different from you or if they make you feel awkward and uncomfortable?
- Why do you fear welcoming others into your life and your home? What promises has God given you that you can cling to for hope, peace, and assurance?

Prayer Points

Take heart in the truth that the God of the weak and the outcast welcomes you—and pray to him for his help in these ways:

- I pray that you would fill me with your Spirit so that my life bears fruit through loving deeds for others.
- I pray that I would hold loosely to all that you have given me and to know that my home, my food, my time and everything else belong to you. Help me to be a faithful steward of all of them.
- I pray that you would give me boldness to welcome others as you have welcomed me.
- I pray that the motivation of my heart would be that, through loving others, I might express my love for Christ. Please give me great joy and freedom in hospitality.

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