

HOSPITALITY



SESSION 1: HOSPITALITY IN A HOSTILE WORLD

Main Text:

Genesis 18:1-15

Take Home Exercise:

Hospitality Audit



OPENING EXERCISE (10 Minutes)

Spend a moment in prayer inviting the Holy Spirit to guide your time together, and then lead your group through the following exercise.

Gather together as a community group in a comfortable setting—around a table, on a couch, on a living room floor, etc. Invite someone in your group to pray and ask the Holy Spirit to lead and guide your time together.

Visio divina (divine seeing) is an ancient practice in which we observe something beautiful (i.e., art, nature) that leads us to contemplate God and commune with him in prayer. For this exercise, you will be taking a close look at a piece by Andrei Rublev titled Icon of the Holy Trinity (located on the next page). Spend some time reflecting on the piece individually, using the following questions, adapted from the InterVarsity The Well Summer 2021 Vision Divina Series, before sharing your observations with the group.

1. As you begin, take a few deep breaths. Take a moment to remember that God is with you, and invite the Holy Spirit to speak to you afresh. Spend some time looking at the image. What do you see? Make as many observations as you can. What do you like or dislike? Why? In what ways does this picture depict the Trinity?
2. How does the artist use color, light, style, composition, and material? What do you think the artist wanted to communicate? What stands out to you? Why do you think this is so?
3. What is God's invitation to you? What might you need to see, understand, or believe? How does your current life experience intersect with what you are seeing and reflecting on? How might this image help you pray today? What do you want to say to God? What do you want to ask from him?

STUDY THIS TOGETHER (20 Minutes)

Lead the study and discussion below for your group. Feel free to read it in its entirety or put it in your own words.

What words or images come to mind when you hear the word “hospitality”? How have these images



Andrei Rublev, Icon of the Holy Trinity

shaped your understanding of hospitality?

How is hospitality different from entertaining? What does this reveal about the posture and intent of hospitality?

Share personal experiences of wonderful hospitality. What were the components? Were you a stranger, guest, or host? Who has made room for you? When have you made room for someone? What did you most appreciate about the welcome you received?

Henri Nouwen once wrote, “If there is any concept worth restoring to its original depth and evocative potential, it is the concept of hospitality. It is one of the richest biblical terms that can deepen and broaden our insights in our relationships with our fellow human beings.” However, for most of us, hospitality brings up images of table settings and quaint dinner parties. And while those may very well be an expression of hospitality, it is so much more. In the New Testament, the word hospitality is *philoxenia*, which literally translates to “love of strangers.” Throughout church history, hospitality has been one of the central ways Christians have expressed the heart of God to the world. Hospitality is creating the space where strangers are welcomed as friends and friends are turned into family.

This practice is increasingly important in the modern world. Because in a world defined by hostility, division, and isolation, I am convinced that the credibility of our witness will depend on the sincerity of our hospitality.

How is hospitality a countercultural or subversive practice? Why do you think scripture places such an emphasis on welcoming strangers?

Spend some time revisiting the text of the sermon from the first week. This passage is one of the first Old Testament narratives that is foundational to hospitality. Abraham demonstrates true hospitality to strangers in his welcome of the three unexpected guests, not only through his actions but also the posture of his service. Abraham also experiences the relational nature of God, whose very essence as triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is love.

Invite someone to read **Genesis 18:1-15** aloud for the group.

How does Abraham’s welcome and service toward his guests demonstrate lavish hospitality? List specific examples.

What can we learn about hospitality from observing the heart posture of Abraham and Sarah in this passage? Why is the posture of our hospitality and welcome toward others so important?

Invite someone to read Hebrews 13:2 aloud for the group. What stands out to you about this verse? How does it connect with the passage in Genesis 18 that we just read?

How do we see Abraham as both host and guest (recipient of hospitality) in this passage?

Look back at the Andrei Rublev painting, Icon of the Holy Trinity, from the opening exercise. How does the passage in Genesis 18 influence or add to what you see in the painting? What aspects of God’s character do you see reflected in these three figures? What do the painting and the passage we just read teach and inspire in us about hospitality and the love of the stranger?

When we practice hospitality, we reflect the inner life of the Trinity. Hospitality was central to the life and the teachings of Jesus. As apprentices of Jesus, hospitality is the measure of our love and maturity in Christ. There are various biblical commands to practice hospitality throughout the New Testament. Invite



four different group members to pick one of the following verses and read it aloud. Take note of any recurring words, phrases, and themes as you listen to and briefly explore these passages together.

Romans 12:13-16
1 Peter 4:9
1 Timothy 3:2
Titus 1:8

What stands out to you from these passages about the posture and practice of hospitality?

DISCUSSION (20 Minutes)

Spend a few moments debriefing the sermon from this week together and discuss the following questions as a group.

Is the practice of hospitality already a part of your apprenticeship to Jesus? If so, what does it look like?

What are your initial thoughts or feelings about practicing hospitality together as a church body? What internal or external resistance might you encounter when it comes to extending hospitality to others?

Spend some time discussing the following quote by Henri Nouwen: “Although many, we might even say most, strangers in this world become easily the victim of a fearful hostility, it is possible for men and women and obligatory for Christians to offer an open and hospitable space where strangers can cast off their strangeness and become our fellow human beings.”

What stands out to you from this quote? Why?

True hospitality entails loving and serving even those who are difficult to love. In the kingdom of God, our enemies are turned into neighbors, who are turned into family. How might God be graciously challenging you to open your heart and home to specific people you may be avoiding or struggling to love?

Are you more comfortable receiving hospitality or offering hospitality to others? Why do you think that might be? Why is it significant that we learn to embrace both roles—host and guest?

Are there ways that this community group can practice hospitality together? Spend some time brainstorming and praying about one or two practical ways you can intentionally extend the love and welcome of Christ to one another, as well as to others outside of your community group.

TAKE-HOME EXERCISE

Read through the exercise below that each individual will do before your next gathering. Talk through any questions people may have about what they are to do. Again, it is about practice, not perfection. Give yourselves grace.

Spend time in silence with the Lord praying through the following Hospitality Audit. Remember that the goal of this exercise is not to bring shame or discouragement. Rather, the intention is to hold space for the Holy Spirit to graciously probe the deepest dimensions of our hearts and reveal the areas where we need to foster greater hospitality toward others—especially those who are difficult for us to love.

Note: Later this fall, as part of the habit series, part of the take-home exercise will be to invite someone (possibly someone who comes to mind during this audit) to share a meal with you.

As you begin, thank God for the welcome he has extended to you. Reflect on Ephesians 2:11-18. Take time to remember specific ways, even from this past week, that God has demonstrated welcome, generosity, and care for you.

It can be easy to drift into worrying that what we have to offer others isn't enough or that extending

hospitality to others will be too challenging. Begin by taking inventory of what God has given you and by thanking him for those things. Consider ways that you can offer those blessings back to God through extending hospitality to others. For example, how might you open your living space or offer your time to others? Who are the people God has placed around you? What strengths or skills has God gifted you with that you can bless others with?

What areas of your life are difficult for you to sacrifice in order to become a more hospitable person (time, attention, budget, cleanliness, etc.)? In what ways can you pray specifically for God to help you gain more of a heart for hospitality toward others?

What fears or hesitations do you have about extending hospitality to others? Honestly share those with him. Is there someone in your life you may be avoiding, or are finding difficult to love? Invite God to bring particular faces and names to mind.

As you consider fears, hesitations, or even areas where you may have neglected to extend hospitality to others, take some time to pray through the following prayer of confession, adapted from the United Methodist Hymnal:

Lord, I confess my day-to-day failure to be truly human.

Lord, I confess to you.

Lord, I confess that I often fail to love with all I have and am, often because I do not fully understand what loving means, often because I am afraid of risking myself.

Lord, I confess to you.

Lord, I confess that by silence and ill-considered word, I have built up walls of prejudice.

Lord I confess that by selfishness and lack of sympathy, I have stifled generosity and left little time for others.

Holy Spirit, speak to me. Help me listen to your word of forgiveness, for I am very deaf. Come, fill this moment and free me from sin.

An important part of the posture of hospitality is an openness and willingness to not only be the host but also the guest. How might God be inviting you to be more open to receiving hospitality from others (i.e. accepting an invitation, help, prayer, advice)?

CLOSE IN PRAYER (5 minutes)

Close your time together with the following prayer from the Book of Common Worship. Then, take some time to share any prayer requests/updates and pray for each other during the upcoming week.

God of grace,
no one is beyond the reach of your love,
or outside your limitless mercy.
move us toward those the world despises and people reject,
So we may venture to follow Christ,
And risk showing his love.
stand with those who are outcast;
strengthen them in peace;
encourage them by your presence;
and use them to build on the cornerstone of Christ,
until differences are honored and respected,
and all people together give you glory. Amen.