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Biblical
Hospitality

StudyNotes

FOR SMALL GROUPS & PERSONAL REFLECTION

Introduction

Good hospitality demands more from us than a convenient Rich Tea biscuit - good and low in fat though they may be... Hospitality must begin with taking a seat and starting to share something that matters - tea in the best china or the biggest mug - whichever demonstrates the greatest love. The good biscuits, the home made cookies and - ideally, something that has potential for mess...

This is crazy! I hear one or two of you object ... Mess? Yes! If it can be eaten or drunk safely standing up - it's not hospitality, it's convenience.

There is a difference between a cocktail party with food that fits neatly into the mouth and a good dish of stew which has much potential for mess. One demands best behaviour and 'standing on ceremony' - the other demands a seat, ideally a table - definitely cutlery and decent crockery and even a serviette to discreetly dab at spills and dribbles.

The Son of Man comes eating and drinking. He sits down with people and shares God's love with them in a relaxed manner. He is open to the mess and the moments of silence. He is present in the chewing and the processing of the Kingdom of God brought near. He is eating and drinking too.

During this season, be aware of your willingness to be hospitable. To be open to giving and receiving invitations to eat with other people. To share morning coffee - remember the good stuff that you love and not a convenient quick option. Make these meetings count! Share testimony, understanding and open your Bibles together.

God is good - taste and savour it!

With love

Catherine

Session 1 Covenant Hospitality

As you Gather *5-10 minutes*

New beginnings are often marked with a meal shared with friends and loved ones. Talk about when you have been part of a celebration meal. What did you eat? Why was it special?

Pray & Worship *10 minutes*

Sing a hymn or a song which you might use as a 'grace' at a mealtime.

Pray

1. That you might know the reality of Christ's presence with you.
2. That you might know the truth of who Jesus is.
3. That the local community might know the transforming love of Jesus.
4. That you would respond to Jesus with faith and obedience in all he asks of us as individuals and as church.

Read the Word *50 minutes*

John 2 :1-11 NIV

On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, 2 and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. 3 When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, 'They have no more wine.' 4 'Woman, why do you involve me?' Jesus replied. 'My hour has not yet come.' 5 His mother said to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you.' 6 Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from eighty to a hundred and twenty litres. 7 Jesus said to the servants, 'Fill the jars with water'; so they filled them to the brim. 8 Then he told them, 'Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet.' They did so, 9 and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realise where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside 10 and said, 'Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now.' 11 What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

The feast is an important place for Jesus to be beginning his ministry. The second coming will speak of the bridegroom (Christ) coming for the bride (the Church). This miracle of water into wine is a glimpse of what blessings will follow when Jesus comes again. JC Ryle says *“To purify the whole visible church and hold a marriage supper will be among his first acts, when he comes again”*. (p36 quoted in Milne p63)

Consider the way that God keeps his promises and how they are answered in the person of Jesus. The bridegroom would have been shamed or even sued (!) for lack of wine at this stage of the wedding celebrations.

What does Jesus’ intervention tell us about the level of God’s relationship with his people?

This first miracle in John’s Gospel shows us John’s understanding of who Jesus is and the purpose of his ministry. The miracle of the water into wine at the wedding shows the power of Jesus to transform shame into rejoicing and reminds us of the John 1, as we see the Creation being formed in obedience to his Word of Power. When Jesus speaks, his words are not merely those of an ordinary man, but of the Son of the Father. They are transforming words.

Talk about the different ways of understanding Jesus. (Friend, King, Shepherd, Lord etc)

In this passage we get a clear picture of the difference it makes to have Jesus present in our lives. It is reminiscent of the Covenant promise of God which we find in various parts of the Old Testament including Leviticus 26:11-12. God among us and our obedience to him make all the difference to the world we inhabit. The Covenant promise of God to be with his people is brought very near in the person of Jesus. He is the fulfilment of the Law - able to keep it and the fulfilment of the Prophets in his incarnate presence on earth.

Look at Mary’s reaction to the wine situation. Does she approach Jesus as her own son or as the Son of the Father?

Mary learns to respond differently to Jesus in order for Jesus to step into his calling and his position.

Talk about how you changed your attitude to Jesus in order that he might have transforming power in your life.

In the New Covenant, the promise of God is enacted at the feast with the water for cleansing being exchanged for wine for celebration. The earthly offering is finite, but the provision of God is eternal and limitless. Jesus brings a superiority to the earthly offerings and expectations. Milne suggests that; *“The picture of the Kingdom as a wedding feast has wide biblical support. For all the reality of the struggles of faith, the pains of the world, and the warfare of the kingdom, Christ continues to invite us to celebrate with him.”* P66

How can you celebrate with Christ in a) your worship, b) your home and c) your struggles?

Reflection & Refreshment *25 minutes*

Over a cup of tea, have a think about this: As we look at Mary’s approach to Jesus, we see her simply laying out the issues that concern her before him.

Look at the verses in your bible and use the phrasing as a prayer for your concerns.

For example: “There are many without food”

Now look at Mary’s response: “Do whatever he tells you”.

The waiting and listening with a deliberate intention of following up with precise obedience is key to living in Covenant hospitality with God.

What is Jesus saying in response to your prayer? What must you do?

Commit to all the group praying in this way for an agreed issue...

Be ready to report back to the group next week

Session 2 Generous Hospitality

As you Gather 5-10 minutes

Talk about times when you encountered the generosity of a stranger, or been reliant on someone you didn't know. What were your thoughts and emotions in this time?

Pray & Worship 10 minutes

Sing a hymn or a song which honours of the grace of God

Pray

1. That you might show God's generosity.
2. That you might be ready with a gracious welcome.
3. That the local community might be aware of the church for the love it shows
4. That you would be courageous in your hospitality.

Read the Word 50 minutes

Genesis 18:1-15 &

Hebrews 13:1-3 NIV

1 Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters.

2 Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.

3 Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are ill-treated as if you yourselves were suffering.

Reflection & Refreshment 25 minutes

Read through Genesis 18:1-15 in your own Bible.

Talk about the 'theophany' - which is the meeting that Abraham had with God (Yahweh) who took a physical appearance.

1. How does God appear?
2. Do you think Abraham knew this was a supernatural meeting?
3. What impresses you about Abraham's hospitality to the strangers?

As Abraham offers good, well-prepared food to his guests, they receive it and eat it in a relaxed way as Abraham himself stands under the tree. It is in the partaking of this meal, that the men bring the news of the fulfilment of God's Covenant Promise to Abraham; that he would be the father of many nations. Genesis 17:4-5.

Talk about how good hospitality can offer a perfect environment for the sharing of Good News.

The Covenant between Abraham and Yahweh was one which needed a visible sign of God's activity in Abraham & Sarah's life. The meal, prepared and provided by Sarah & Abraham shows their willingness to embrace the needs of the stranger who passes by and so to afford the strangers significance. The meal is spectated by Abraham & Sarah - though they are separated by the tent in which Sarah is confined.

What sign are they going to be looking out for?

What are the disadvantages of 'entertaining angels?' (v14)

Look at the passage from Hebrews. There are 4 simple exhortations.

Talk about how hospitality is an integral part of "Loving one another as brothers and sisters".

Brown in his Commentary on Hebrews writes;

Love is not content with words. It demonstrates its reality in compassionate deeds. The readers must open their homes to visitors and be generous with their possessions. First Century inns were notoriously immoral, unhygienic and expensive. Christian travellers had to know they could count on a warm welcome at the home of a fellow believer. If love does not issue in a hospitable home, it has scarcely begun to work at all.
P 249

Even in the First Century, Christians were being reminded of the need for them to not simply 'talk a good love' but to show it in their actions, especially in their actions towards those who come in God's Name.

What do you expect from other Churches when you are travelling and visiting new communities?

What risks do we take when we 'open our homes to visitors'?

How can we offer hospitality and be safe?

In the First Century, the people in prison were likely fellow believers who were imprisoned for their faith, and similarly those 'who are mistreated'.

Just because we have not met them, does not mean that they are not part of our family.

What should we be learning from this as a practical lesson for our care for other Christians today?

Reflection & Refreshment *25 minutes*

Supporting the work of Christians in other places is an act of love and generosity for which you gain nothing on earth.

Talk about the support you have given Christians either passing through your community or who are working in different parts of the world. Why is this important?

Pray for the people you support but have not met.

How far does Biblical Hospitality reach?

Discuss a plan for your group to bless a Christian group that is in need and to act on it in the next few weeks.

Session 3 The Table of the Lord

As you Gather *5-10 minutes*

Talk about favourite places to eat! What makes it special to eat there?
What is your favourite food?

Pray & Worship *10 minutes*

Sing a hymn or a song which declares God's Salvation.

Pray

1. Prayers of thanksgiving for all God gives.
2. Prayers of acknowledgement for all God provides for our joy.
3. For a greater hope in the Salvation which God freely offers.
4. For a desire to be a people of hospitality.
5. For a church which is known for generosity beyond expectation.
6. For your minister and church leadership to be leaders in hospitality.

Read the Word *50 minutes*

Isaiah 25 NIV & Psalm 23

Lord, you are my God; I will exalt you and praise your name, for in perfect faithfulness you have done wonderful things, things planned long ago. 2 You have made the city a heap of rubble, the fortified town a ruin, the foreigners' stronghold a city no more; it will never be rebuilt. 3 Therefore strong peoples will honour you; cities of ruthless nations will revere you. 4 You have been a refuge for the poor, a refuge for the needy in their distress, a shelter from the storm and a shade from the heat. For the breath of the ruthless is like a storm driving against a wall 5 and like the heat of the desert. You silence the uproar of foreigners; as heat is reduced by the shadow of a cloud, so the song of the ruthless is stilled. 6 On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine - the best of meats and the finest of wines. 7 On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; 8 he will swallow up death for ever. The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove his people's disgrace from all the earth. The Lord has spoken. 9 In that day they will say, 'Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us. This is the Lord, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation.'

The hospitality that we see in Psalm 23: 'the prepared table' and in the feast in Isaiah 25 are pictures of how God himself offers hospitality to his people.

Talk about the differences between 'eating on the run' and 'feasting'.

Often after a time of trouble or struggle, there is, as in each of these pictures, a sense of release and victory. God's presence is the place of feasting. This is in direct contrast to the darkness and destruction that has come before.

What are the benefits that come with the feast?

In Isaiah 25 (as well as in 24), Wilcock points out that the "*city of v 2 represents the world as a whole, organised in opposition to God. He destroys it, not for any spiteful satisfaction he may have in doing so, but in order to bring the nations to their senses (3) and to deliver those who have been the victims of their misuse of power (4-5).*" P108

God's enemies are the ones who celebrate and are proud of their own strength and their own achievements. They are ones who cause needy and the poor distress and the enemies are excluded from the feast.

Talk about how our response to God determines our place at the table.

Is the table open to all?

Who will you find there?

Talk about whether all these people will know God.

What reasons do you have for your viewpoint?

Note down some Biblical references to support it.

Both Isaiah and David recognise that the Lord will have his victory and save his people from the enemy. In Psalm 23, the table of the Lord is prepared, 'In the presence of the enemies' - most likely they were literally bound as captives and made to watch the feast. Isaiah though is talking of a

complete victory over death itself, which is represented by a sheet or a shroud - covering the people in death. As the Lord destroys the shroud which symbolises death, he does it from the place of salvation, Zion, his holy mountain.

Talk about how this picture is completed in the New Testament in the person of Jesus.

The feast that God provides is a picture of the relief and joy which accompany salvation. The holy mountain is Zion- God's dwelling place. This place is full of a prepared feast of amazing and wonderful food. (v 6). Wilcock points out that although the invitation is to 'all peoples' they can only receive it on Zion - they must come to God's table.

As you consider this passage, look up some of the references that refer to the host and the feast in the New Testament.

Check some of the parables and Revelation.

God's hospitality is for his friends, for the people who know him and who are his people. If you are invited to a fancy party, your name must be on the list to gain admission; in the same way, you personally must know God in order to have access to the banquet - to salvation.

Is there a seat at God's table with your name on it?

Reflection & Refreshment *25 minutes*

In Scripture, the responsibility for the poor and the stranger lies with God's people. In our time, that responsibility has been taken by governments and the establishment.

Talk about the role of the church in the care of the vulnerable and the poor.

Does this mean doing more than donating to the local food bank (which is good and necessary)?

What can your group do to fully demonstrate the care that God has for the poor and the needy in your area?

Session 4 Meals Begin Mission

As you Gather *5-10 minutes*

Share a small ‘meal’ of snacks that are brought by everyone and placed on a table as you talk about your day.

Pray & Worship *10 minutes*

Sing a hymn or a song which describes the Mission of God.

Pray

1. In praise and honour of all God is.
2. With words that describe your love for God.
3. For the missionaries living and sharing Good News to the Nations.
4. For a missionary heart within you and your group.
5. For a church which is willing to break its own boundaries in pursuit of the Kingdom..
6. For your minister and church leadership to be open to the new things that God is leading them into.

Read the Word *50 minutes*

Acts 10 9-29. NIV

9 About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. 10 He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. 11 He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. 12 It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles and birds. 13 Then a voice told him, ‘Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.’ 14 ‘Surely not, Lord!’ Peter replied. ‘I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.’ 15 The voice spoke to him a second time, ‘Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.’ 16 This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven. 17 While Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision, the men sent by Cornelius found out where Simon’s house was and stopped at the gate. 18 They called out, asking if Simon who was known as Peter was staying there. 19 While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, ‘Simon, three men are looking for you. 20 So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them.’ 21 Peter went down and said to the men, ‘I’m the one you’re looking for. Why have you come?’ 22 The men replied, ‘We have come from Cornelius the centurion. He is a righteous and God-fearing man,

who is respected by all the Jewish people. A holy angel told him to ask you to come to his house so that he could hear what you have to say.’ 23 Then Peter invited the men into the house to be his guests. The next day Peter started out with them, and some of the believers from Joppa went along. 24 The following day he arrived in Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. 25 As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence. 26 But Peter made him get up. ‘Stand up,’ he said, ‘I am only a man myself.’ 27 While talking with him, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people. 28 He said to them: ‘You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean. 29 So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?’

There are some huge shifts in the course of the hospitality shown and offered in the verses above. As Cook describes it,

God prepares Peter to leap an enormous barrier (vv9-23)! Peter, who has just told the dead Tabitha to ‘get up’ (9:40), and before her, the paralytic Aeneas, to ‘get up’ (9:34), is now told in a trance: ‘Get up Peter. Kill and eat’ (10:13). In the vision, Peter saw the heavens open and a sheet let down containing clean and unclean animals. Peter responds: ‘Surely not, Lord’ (v14). This happens three times - familiar for Peter no doubt! ... His reply shows that the connection between the vision and the lesson is not yet clear for him. What he has to learn is that it is no longer appropriate to apply the distinction of clean and unclean either to what you eat, or with whom you eat. pp163-4

This is about crossing thresholds into new territory. For both Peter and Cornelius, they were to step into the fulness of God’s plan for his children to be of ‘many nations’ as promised to Abraham.

What preparations do you make before starting a new job or visiting a new place?

How do you get ready for the demands that it will make on you?

How did God prepare Peter?

What barriers would Peter be confronted by?

Why was Peter’s new attitude needed for the mission of the Gospel to progress?

God had begun the work of mission by meeting with the two significant people. In the earlier verses of the Chapter, he sends an angel to Cornelius who is instructed to send messengers to Peter to join him in his home. Soon, Cornelius' faith would be ignited by hearing the Gospel of Christ and the work of God would extend. This is a real example of 3 groups of people stepping out in faith.

Talk about the importance of using our homes as places for mission. What are the advantages?

How does Peter practise his new found freedom from the ties that bound him to his old culture before the important meeting with Cornelius? Why does this matter?

Look at yourself. What are your own boundaries for your mission?

How can you practise moving beyond them as a person who is transformed by the cross of Jesus?

Reflection & Refreshment *25 minutes*

Hospitality involves eating together.

Peter eats with the messengers sent by Cornelius: he is quick to understand from the vision that God's Kingdom makes brothers and sisters of people from different cultures and backgrounds.

Meals begin mission. God shows Peter a vision of food and teaches him that what is on a table is should not be a barrier for people; rather it is part of the goodness that God provides. The table is where barriers begin to be broken down and new initiatives are begun.

Inviting people into your home is costly - in providing good food and in embracing someone else's thoughts and ideas to be part of your fellowship. This is where mission begins and the good news of the Gospel of Christ is Shared.

How could you be deliberate in getting rid of some of the barriers in your own life that stop you from being able to embrace 'those really annoying or difficult people' - especially those who form part of your church family...

Pray together for the new mission that God is releasing you into. That your boundaries are broken down by the transforming love of God in Christ.

Commit to sharing a meal in your home - or inviting someone out for coffee - with the simple intention of getting to know them better. Maybe this could be someone from church who you don't know so well or a friend or neighbour you don't get to spend much time with.

Loving God who came eating and drinking;
who entered the homes of tax collectors and sinners;
who broke social convention for the good of the sick and dying
who prepared a meal for his hungry friends on the sea shore...

We ask that we may learn the gift of hospitality;
To seek to serve, to welcome, to share our food and our things.

Teach us the way of grace and break our boundaries
Which have limited your grace and the flow of love.

Loving God who came eating and drinking;
The Son of Man, who saves us all;
May we sit at your table and learn the manners of the King
Who prepares a banquet and offers a seat to all.

In Jesus' Name.

Amen

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Encourage One Another & Build Each Other Up 1 Thessalonians 5: 11

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