



## September/October 2023

### Reclaiming the Gift of Hospitality

What comes to mind when you think of hospitality? Today, the term is often associated with a professional industry that offers services (e.g., lodging, meals, entertainment) for a price. Serving you may be 'their pleasure', but the exchange is not a gift. It's based on a market economy. The more you pay, the higher the level of service you expect to receive.

When we apply the word to people, we may imagine a host who welcomes and feeds others in their home. Words like 'fellowship', 'kindness', and 'hosting' are related to hospitality, but it's original meaning had something more specific in mind. In the New Testament, hospitality had a certain audience in mind - strangers. At its root, it is the act of 'loving the stranger.'

#### Hospitality is the act of loving strangers.

Hospitality comes from two Greek words used in the New Testament, *philoxenia* (philo, 'love', xenia, 'stranger') and *xenodocheo* (dechomai= receive or embrace). In the first century, if you were travelling out of town, you depended on strangers to care for you without an expected return for their hospitality. Jesus told a story that captures well the difference of who we extend hospitality to in Luke 14:12-14:

Then Jesus said to his host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the

*blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."*

When you read biblical stories and teachings on hospitality, the focus on strangers is often refined further to strangers who are vulnerable to suffering or exploitation, like orphans and widows. Hospitality to the travelling wealthy landowner is important, but the primary emphasis on hospitality in the Bible is loving the stranger in most need of care.

#### Hospitality is the act of loving vulnerable strangers.

*"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.'*



*When?*

*Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.' Matt. 25:34-40*

Notice also the way hospitality expresses love. It is highly relational. Hospitality welcomes the other into one's care. The food, clothes, and shelter are essential, but the context for such gifts matters a great deal. Imagine you're homeless and spending your nights at a local shelter. A stranger drops off a bin of clothes that you're invited to sift through. After eating dinner  
*(continued other other side)*



### Flourish 2024: Lead with Purpose

February 15-19, 2024, Pastors and lay leaders alike will join us in sunny Bradenton, FL for a leader & spouse retreat of rest and renewal.

"Lead with Purpose" will focus on identifying ways that further our mission of outreach and discipleship. Special guest Pastor Eric Rojas of Rolling Hills Community Church (Franklin, TN) will join us for a series of messages and a workshop track on leading well. Other seminars include activating leaders, practicing artistic reflection on the Scripture, living a life of hospitality, and the Psalms as food for the leader's soul. With input that will challenge and equip, this is a Flourish you will not want to miss! Couples and individuals are welcome.

**Visit [EvanaNetwork.org](http://EvanaNetwork.org) for more info. Early Bird prices end October 31, 2023.**

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with their family, the same stranger drives down to the shelter and feeds you dinner. Such acts of generosity certainly bless you in tangible ways. Imagine this alternative- The stranger invites you into his or her home for dinner and expresses a genuine interest in your wellbeing. You eat together around their table and help clean the kitchen afterwards.

Loving vulnerable strangers by welcoming them into one's care implies a social connection with greater risks and rewards when compared with other forms of generosity like a financial donation or volunteer service. Every form of generosity is important, but hospitality may be the most misunderstood and least practiced today. In an age of increased isolation, economic segregation and social mistrust, it may also hold the greatest potential to bless vulnerable strangers.

### **Hospitality is the act of loving vulnerable strangers by welcoming them into one's care.**

It's important to acknowledge that hospitality always requires some degree of vulnerability. There's certainly some fine print on the label about how the very nature of proximity and social connection creates risks. Such risks should be easily distinguished though from throwing prudence to the wind and knocking down every boundary. Hospitality does not require giving everything to anyone. The question is more, 'Do we recognize vulnerable strangers for whom the potential rewards of hospitality outweigh the risks?' Are we even connected enough to vulnerable strangers where hospitality can be naturally extended?

### **Where to Start?**

How do we reconcile this call to hospitality that runs throughout Scripture with the reality of our lives today? A good starting point is to simply take it seriously and

ask God for a vision and help with discernment.

"God, I don't have the bandwidth, interest, personality, or resources to practice such a form of hospitality. Give me a vision for what it would mean to be hospitable. Where there is fear, drive it out with your love. Where there is distance, show me where to press in close."

Along with seeking God's vision for hospitable living, we can begin to structure our lives to be more hospitable. The practice requires a fair amount of rootedness in place, margin of time, a willingness to risk trust of strangers, and refusing to see everything we have from a market-mindset and cash flow potential.

### **Simplicity towards hospitality is a great path towards fruitful generosity.**

If we're home more, willing to share space and food, connected more in our communities, especially with those most vulnerable, with a vision for hospitality... it will no doubt lead to life-changing blessings for people; former strangers who now call you friend.

One tangible opportunity can be found in the US State Department's new program called the Welcome Corps (<https://welcomecorps.org/>). This project allows small groups of US citizens to sponsor refugee families who are presently living in refugee camps. You could gather a few friends together a sponsor a family.

No doubt the specifics will fall into place as we allow God to change our hearts and minds. God will give vision and discernment. Will we open ourselves to it? Will we allow God's love to drive out our fears and even reorient our priorities and schedules?

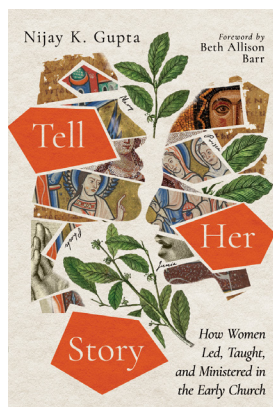
Imagine this type of hospitality as a normal practice in our church. It would change things, don't you think?

- Wes Furlong , Director of Church Development

## **Tell Her Story**

Since inception, Evana has taught God's Spirit for ministry and mission is poured out on all sons and daughters, made one in Christ (Joel 2:28, Gal 3:28). From Board members to Pastors to lay leaders, we recognize the role all members have in furthering the Gospel and church ministry.

There are a few texts I've appreciated among many. Nijay Gupta's "Tell Her Story: How Women Led, Taught, and Ministered in the Early Church" is an excellent start. YWAM founder Loren Cunningham's "Why Not Women?" is an older but well-written work. For a resource that supports women leaders in and outside the church, I've had wonderful interactions and learnings with Kadi Cole of [kadicole.com](http://kadicole.com) and [ministrychick.com](http://ministrychick.com). - Tyler Hartford



## **Visit Israel/Jordan with Evana Network in 2024!**

Desire a Holy Land experience that will transform your reading of Scripture, understanding of faith history, and relationship with Jesus and his church? Join Experienced tour leaders Tyler Hartford (Evana's Director of Church Leadership) and Todd Martin (Pastor, Smithville Mennonite) on a 10 day tour from July 16- 26, 2024. This trip will have departures from Chicago, Cleveland and New York.

If interested, email [tyler@evananetwork.org](mailto:tyler@evananetwork.org). Visit link for more info, and if placing a deposit, use the below codes for identifying group.

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