

Hospitality: The Lost Virtue of the 21st Century Church

“Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you...for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me.” Mt 25:34-35

Growing up in Eastern Europe, Jelena cherished the memories of guests in her family’s home. Sleeping on the floor was never a problem if the pay-off was the excitement of meeting someone new, a full table, laughter, and late night stories. Since then, Jelena has learned that true hospitality begins with God, and hospitality in the 21st Century, especially to strangers, does not come easy for us. Until we are deeply rooted in the knowledge of God’s grace, we have neither the living example nor the strength of commitment to live hospitably in a hostile world. Hospitality means receiving someone, from the heart, into our own dwelling place and providing for the needs, comforts, and delights of that someone with all the openness, respect, freedom, tenderness, and joy that love itself embodies. How do we practice openness towards strangers in our community? How do we experience the hospitality of God in our lives?

Jelena Sivulka was born and raised in Serbia, where she got her master’s degree in psychology and a master’s degree in theology. She became a Christian 25 years ago and a few years later got involved in ministry with her husband Greg, planting churches, distributing humanitarian aid, and partnering with Joni and Friends, serving people with disabilities. Jelena has also worked as a counsellor in Serbia’s schools and a social worker, and she is currently working as therapist in a medical clinic. She is the founder and director of the non-profit organization Hana's Hope. She has been blessed with three children: Benjamin, Sara, and Hana, who has autism.

I. Introduction

A. Hospitality in the ancient Near East

- A matter of survival
- A matter of protection
- A matter of care
- A matter of honor

B. Hospitality - the lost word in the Western World

- Not a matter of showing off your house, decorating skills, cooking abilities

Hospitality is not about the provider. It is not about showing how creative, innovative, organized, proficient, and gifted one is. Instead, it is about selflessly sacrificing one’s time, efforts, and some degree of finances. It is about taking the risk to let your guard down and invite people to get to know you beyond a superficial level. It is about abandoning the sinful tendency to be self-absorbed and instead seek to do whatever is necessary to meet needs.

It is about God and how he uses you and your possessions to serve those you come into contact with – both friends and strangers, both believers and nonbelievers.

II. The essence of Hospitality

A. Greek “philozenia”, (philo) love & (zenia) stranger

To honor and obey God by serving those around us

- B. Hallmark of virtue
 - a. Abraham & Sara, Gen.18:1-10, meeting and receiving a Holy Presence
 - b. Opportunity to meet a singular stranger, Risen Christ, Mt. 25:34-35

C. Spiritual gift or scriptural mandate

When someone opens their door, you feel a mixture of wonder, gratitude, guilt and humility.

“Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.” ~ Romans 12:13

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unaware.” ~ Hebrews 13:2

“Show hospitality to one another without grumbling.” ~ 1 Peter 4:9 –

III. Master mind of hospitality

- A. In the beginning – A safe place
- B. Invitation to take part - Provision
- C. Invitation to belong - Family
- D. Invitation to dwell - Intimacy

“How do we experience the hospitality of God the Father? Of Christ? Of the Spirit in our lives? “

IV. Our heart as a dwelling place

- A. Invitation to receive
- B. Martha vs. Mary - Is it possible that Jesus experienced Mary’s listening as a deeper act of hospitality than the provision of food and drink?

Our hospitality is rooted and grounded in God’s hospitality towards us in Christ.

V. Compassion & Community

“The World can use more ordinary Christians opening their lives so others can see what life in the light of the gospel looks like. And what better place to watch Christians than in their homes?” - Dustin Willis

- A. Act of sacrificial joy
- B. Strategic hospitality, John Piper
- C. Power of a living room - evangelism in the 21st century

VI. Simple stories of an extraordinary act

“Something holy happens around a dinner table that will never happen in a sanctuary. In a church auditorium you see the backs of heads. Around the table you see the expressions on faces. Church services are on the clock. Around the table there is time to talk. When you open your door to someone you are sending this message: “You matter to me and to God.” You think you are saying, “Come over for a visit.” But what your guest hears is, “I am worth the effort.”

Max Lucado

Suggested Readings:

Lucado, Max, *Outlive Your Life*, Thomas Nelson, 2010.

Nouwen, Henry J.M., *Can you drink this Cup?*, Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 2006.

Mary Mohler, *Hospitality Matters, Recovering Hospitality*, 2015.

<https://cbmw.org/series/hospitality-matters/hospitality-matters-the-true-purpose-of-hospitality/>

Thompson, Marjorie J., *Soul Feast*, Louisville: WJK Press, 2005.

Willis D., Clement B., *The Simplest Way to Change the World: Biblical Hospitality as a way of life*, Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2017.