



## “You Are Welcome”

Romans 12:13

**Idea:** As strangers, we have been welcomed by God in Jesus Christ.

**Intro:** The Apostle Paul describes the marks of a true Christian:

*9 Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. 10 Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. 11 Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. 12 Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. 13 Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. – Romans 12:9-13*

What does it mean, “to show hospitality?” A simple definition is “the friendly and generous reception and entertainment of guests, visitors, or strangers.” The word Paul used in verse 13 is φιλοξενία, a compound word made from the combination of φίλος and ξένος. It literally means “the love of strangers.”

Can you say today that you have a love for strangers? I get it. It’s hard to love people you don’t know. There’s a lot of

uncertainty and risk when you meet a stranger, much less invite them into your life. You never know what you're getting. I heard about a seminary student who drove about thirty miles to church on Sunday mornings. He would frequently pick up hitchhikers. One day he picked up a young man who noticed that he was wearing a suit and asked if he could go to church with him. The student said, "Of course you can."

The stranger came to church and afterward was invited over to one of the members' home for lunch and fellowship. While there, he received a hot bath, some clean clothes, and a hot meal. In conversation with the young man, his hosts found that he was a Christian, but he had been out of fellowship with the Lord. His home was in another state and he was just passing through on his way back. Later in the evening, they bought him a bus ticket and set him on his way.

A week later, the seminary student received a letter from the hitchhiker. Enclosed with the letter was a newspaper clipping with the headlines reading, "Man turns himself in for murder." This young man had killed a teenage boy in an attempted robbery and had been running away from the law for some time. But the kindness and hospitality of Christians had convicted him. He wanted to be in fellowship with God, and he knew he needed to do the right thing about his crime.

Little did those Christians know that by their faithfulness to show hospitality they had influenced a man to do what was right in God's eyes and thereby help restore him to fellowship with His Lord.

Would you welcome a stranger into your home today? Would you welcome a stranger into your church today?

**Inquiry:** We don't see much hospitality in America today, not even in the Bible belt. Why? Culturally, America is becoming less and less hospitable because America is becoming more and more secular. And the reason America is moving toward secularism is because the church is moving toward secularism.

Christians are forsaking their distinctiveness as the children of God. Those marks Paul spoke of in Romans 12 are being marginalized and even forsaken.

*1 Let brotherly love continue. 2 Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.* – Hebrews 13:1-2

Romans 12:13 commands us to “seek to show hospitality.” Based on this stern warning, evidently this is mark that can easily fall into neglect. And indeed it can.

The physical force of gravity pulls everything to the center of the earth. In order to break free from earth-centered life, thousands and thousands of pounds of energy have to push the Atlas V rocket away from the center. There is also a psychological force of gravity that constantly pulls our thoughts, affections, and physical actions inward toward the center of our own selves and our own homes.

Therefore, the most natural thing in the world is to neglect hospitality. It is the path of least resistance. All we have to do is yield to the natural gravity of our self-centered life, and the result will be a life so full of self that there is no room for hospitality. We will forget about it, and we will neglect it. So the Bible bluntly says, “Stop it!” Build a launching pad. Fill up your boosters. And blast out of your self-oriented routine. Stop neglecting hospitality. Practice hospitality.

Why? What does hospitality have to do with my relationship with Jesus Christ?

The God-centered motivation for hospitality begins in the Old Testament. Perhaps the clearest text is Leviticus 19:33-34:  
*33 "When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. 34 You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.*

Do you see the motivation for hospitality? God said to Israel, "I am the Lord your God." Biblical hospitality is rooted in God's hospitality as He reached out and welcomed sinful men and women.

God says to love strangers because you were strangers in Egypt. Why should a person love strangers just because he has been a stranger? That is a good question, but I'm not sure that is God's point. He wants Israel to see that they were strangers in Egypt but aren't anymore because "I am the Lord your God."

The words, "I am the Lord your God," are packed with meaning because they are the very first words of the Ten Commandments (Ex 20:2). Any good Israelite could finish the sentence: "*I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.*" This phrase "I am the Lord your God" is shorthand for: I am Yahweh who came to you when you were oppressed aliens in Egypt and saved you.

This is the grace of God, and it spills over into the New Testament.

*11 Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called "the uncircumcision" by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands— 12 remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.*

– Eph 2:11-13

**Biblical Truth:** We are to welcome the stranger because God in Jesus Christ has welcomed us as strangers.

You are welcome in Jesus Christ because:

## **1. God has opened Himself to you.**

For the believer, Paul makes the point that there was a time when you were separated from Christ, strangers to the covenants of promise, and without God. Your sin had separated you from God and inhibited Him from hearing you (Is 59:2). Your sin was great, but His grace was greater. The Bible says that even though there is nothing good in any of us, God loves us. He loves us so much He sent God the Son to take our sin upon Himself so that we might become righteous in Him.

*But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. God has opened Himself to you. In your sin you have rejected God. You have run away like the prodigal son after everything this world has to offer, yet He still opens Himself to you. He lifts His loving arms in warm embrace to each and every sinner who will turn to Him in faith and repentance.*

You are welcome in Jesus Christ because God has opened Himself to you.

## **2. God has served you.**

*...you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.*

Hospitality is the friendly and generous reception and entertainment of strangers. It is loving strangers. Job is a great example of what hospitality looks like. He told God, *“The sojourner has not lodged in the street; I have opened my doors to the traveler”* (Job 31:32). Job served the stranger. He sacrificially gave his best.

God has served you and I with His best. He gave Himself. Paul reminds us that it is nothing less than the

blood of Jesus Christ that has brought us near to God. You are welcome because God paid the ultimate price for your redemption. It isn't something you earn. It's something you freely receive.

You are welcome in Jesus Christ because God has served you.

### **3. God has rejoiced in you.**

*So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God... – Eph 2:19*

*So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God. – Gal 4:7*

You are family! You have been adopted into the family of God. You possess all the rights and privileges that come with being a child of God. And one of the most precious things about being a child of God is that we have an Abba. We have a Daddy who rejoices at our birth. He says to the angels of heaven, "Boys, isn't she beautiful! My new daughter is priceless!" We have a Daddy who rejoices over each step we make and every growth mark we pass. He rejoices in our successes and picks us up in our failures.

We have a good, good Father. In this world, you may feel like just a number...like no one cares. That might have been the way you felt in your home growing up, but that is not the way God feels about you. He loves you, and He rejoices over you as a Heavenly Daddy. You are His child.

**Conclusion:** Hospitality may be on the decline in America today, but it is not on the decline with God. He loves strangers. In fact it has been said that God's love is like the Amazon River flowing down to water one daisy. You are welcome to

God precisely because He has set His love and affection upon you. He has opened Himself to you. He has served you. And He rejoices over you.

How is your hospitality? During this series we're going to learn more about God's hospitality toward strangers, and we're going to learn how to become a more welcoming Christian and a more welcoming church. The Bible tells us that the Holy Spirit is conforming us into the image of Christ.

Do you know Jesus Christ? Have you experienced His love? Do you welcome the stranger because God in Jesus Christ has welcomed you as a stranger? How has God spoken to your heart today? How should you respond?