



## “Are You Welcoming”

1 Peter 4:8-10

**Idea:** God calls believers to a lifestyle of hospitality.

**Intro:** John and Nancy had spent most of their early adult years living in the city, raising their children. They always dreamed of retiring and owning a home on the coast. After a long search, they finally found a perfect lot in a cozy community. They purchased the land and built *the home on the water* they always wanted.

Not long after moving into the house, John and Nancy quickly learned that their cozy new community was a closed one. Most of the citizens who resided there had lived in the community their entire lives and did not warm up to strangers very well. John and Nancy, however, were strong extroverts, so they didn’t allow it to hinder their involvement.

They decided to begin worshiping the Lord with the people at the local church. On the first Sunday they received a combination of gentle greets and glares. It wasn’t as if the members of the church didn’t want John and Nancy there; they just didn’t expect John and Nancy to be there. The couple

stayed in the church and worked to develop relationships with the people.

Little by little over the years, relationships did begin to form. But in the eyes of most of the people, John and Nancy were “new comers,” as Joan often liked to point out to them. In fact it took twenty years for someone to invite John and Nancy to Sunday school.

One winter while John and Nancy were “snow-birding” in Florida, Joan and her husband happened to be down there too. They came over to John and Nancy’s RV for dinner one night, and the two couples got to talking about their cozy community up north. Joan shared some juicy gossip on how some of the people in the community had treated some recent “new comers.” The people had apparently been really mean. They refused to acknowledge them, and if they did have to speak, they quickly pointed out that the family was a “new comer” and was not a life-long resident of the community like the rest of them.

Joan said to Nancy, “Can you believe someone could be that unwelcoming?” Nancy, at that point, looked over at John and winked, saying, “Yeah, I can’t even imagine that.”

How many Joans are in the congregation today? How many people fit the description of a person who is completely oblivious to how unwelcoming he or she is? How many Nancys, if brutally honest, could stand up and point out the Joans in the congregation because you have experienced what it feels like to not be fully welcomed into a group?

The Myth of a Welcoming Church & Christian:  
You perceive you are friendly because you and your friends are friendly to one another.

The reality is many are not friendly because you don’t think about the guest and what he or she may experience. Most church members have forgotten what it’s like to be a first-time

guest. I believe the reason most Christians don't share gospel with others is because they have forgotten what it was like to be lost and a stranger to God.

How welcoming are you? How welcoming is our church?

**Inquiry:** We are in a series on biblical hospitality that we're simply calling "Welcome." The meta-narrative of Scripture is that God has invited and welcomed sinful strangers into a redemptive relationship with Himself. Jesus said, "*Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*" (Matt 11:28). The word "all" in the Greek (πᾶς) means all. In the Lord all are welcome. It is here that we learn a great truth.

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

Our God is a welcoming God. He embraces the stranger with arms wide open. As born-again children in the family of God, as His image bearers in this dark world, we are to welcome the stranger because the Lord has welcomed us.

Read 1 Peter 4:8-10.

Peter instructs the believers who had been scattered due to persecution how to live their Christian lives. According to the apostle, the life we live in this sinful world, while waiting on the return of our Lord, should be lived soberly, watchfully, and prayerfully. "*The end of all things is at hand*" (vs. 7). He tells us what we must show, shoulder, and share with others.

Peter helps us grasp a good understanding of what a welcoming Christian looks like.

Are you a welcoming Christian? Let me give you three metrics by which to measure your hospitality.

**1. A welcoming Christian earnestly loves strangers. (vs. 8)**

Keep loving one another. Peter quotes an old Hebrew proverb (Prov 10:12). The word he uses in his Greek translation of it is ἐκτενῆ. It is used only one other time in the New Testament (Acts 12:5). Peter had been imprisoned by Herod and was facing execution the next morning. During the night the church was praying for him the text says, “without ceasing” (ἐκτενωσ).

The term, translated “earnestly” and “fervent” in the New King James means “to be stretched,” “to be strained.” It is used of a runner who is moving at maximum output with taut muscles straining and stretching to the limit. This kind of love requires a Christian to put another’s spiritual good ahead of his or her desires and in spite of feelings or experiences.

Above all, this kind of commitment to the love which Jesus demonstrated should be personified in the Christian’s life.

“The earnest man is a man of one idea, and that one idea occupies, possesses, and fills his soul.”

– John Angell James

It is the nature of true spiritual love, whether from God to man or Christian to Christian, or Christian to non-Christian, to cover sins. This teaching doesn’t mean that we overlook a sinning, unrepentant church member. But it does mean that we should overlook sins against ourselves when possible and always be ready to forgive insults and unkindness. We should earnestly look past the warts and flaws of others and love the strangers. We should earnestly love those who aren’t like us, those we don’t know, and even those who are offensive or embarrassing.

Have you ever met a Christian like this? Have you met the kind of Christian who is dead set on ensuring you feel welcome? That is what a welcoming Christian

looks like. How do you measure up?

## **2. A welcoming Christian willingly loves strangers. (vs. 9)**

Love is intensely practical, not just emotional. In the early church, love included opening one's home and caring for the needs of others. Peter commands believers to demonstrate hospitality (the love of strangers), and he adds a qualifier. He says, "*without grumbling.*"

The fact that he adds the qualifier to the command means it is possible to show hospitality to strangers but do so in the wrong spirit. It means that you can simply go through the motions and not engage your heart. The command to be hospitable is not just a command to do something. It is not just a command that can be legalistically fulfilled with a quota of guests. It is a command to be a certain kind of person, namely, the kind that doesn't resent having to be hospitable. It's a command to be the kind of Christian who doesn't look at the extra dishes, the messy floor, or the laundry and grumble.

People are messy! Often times being hospitable to strangers means it's messy for you too. But that is good because that is often how ministry happens. I had to learn this lesson the hard way. I was an intern in the student ministry at my home church for three years while in college. I ran our 17,000 square foot student facility, which included a café, indoor basketball cage, game consoles, and two large meeting rooms. Every Wednesday we would bus in hundreds of middle school students after school. Between the middle, junior, and high school students, we would have 500-600 students in our building for 3-4 hours. As you can imagine, there were always messes to clean up. Food and drinks would get spilled. Toilets would get clogged. Video games would glitch. Volunteers would fail to show up.

After a while, I began to resent the students. Many of them were ungrateful and entitled. I began to fuss the whole time they were in the building and couldn't wait till the evening was over. One day in my devotion time, the Lord hit me over the head with Proverbs 14:4.

*“Where there are no oxen, the manger is clean, but abundant crops come by the strength of the ox.”*

If you want a clean stall in the barn, you can't have an ox. Not having an ox means you don't get the benefits an ox provides either.

How do you measure up? Are you a welcoming Christian? If you are, it means you're the kind of Christian who doesn't just welcome strangers, but you like to welcome strangers. You delight in it.

*“Show hospitality to one another without grumbling.”*  
As the next verse implies, let your hospitality be an extension or an overflow of God's hospitality to you.

### **3. A welcoming Christian selflessly loves strangers. (vs. 10)**

The Bible says that each of us as believers have been given a supernaturally designed ability by which the Holy Spirit ministers to the body of Christ and to the lost world (Rom 12:3-8; 1 Cor 12:4-10). In addition the believer knows that every resource he or she has is a gift from God to be used in service of others.

A welcoming Christian understands that he or she has experienced the hospitality of God as He welcomed and blessed the individual with a relationship and gifts. Now that welcoming Christian uses his or her life as a conduit of God's hospitality to others rather than being self-decaying cul-de-sac.

How are you measuring up? Have you identified the

gifts, resources, and abilities the Lord has given you?  
Are you employing them in service to others? Are you  
stewarding them well?

The good steward holds what he has loosely,  
understanding that it is not really his. He works it. He  
invests it. He trusts God with it. He believes that what  
he has is his so that he can serve others with it.

**Conclusion:** How are you measuring up? Are you a  
welcoming Christian? Can you say that you earnestly love  
strangers, or are you upset when you find them in “your seat”  
on Sunday morning? Do you willingly love strangers, or do  
you love them because you’re supposed to? Do you find  
yourself thinking about the welfare of others before you ever  
think of yourself?

God’s Word calls us as individual Christians to a lifestyle of  
hospitality. Here is the reason. When you have welcoming  
Christians who earnestly, willingly, and selflessly love  
strangers, then you will have a church that earnestly, willingly,  
and selflessly loves strangers.

How are we as a church doing in this area? Are we a  
welcoming church? Are we focused on ourselves or on others?  
Are we a conduit of God’s grace or a cul-de-sac?