

Hi, neighbor!

WEEK 2



HOOK

Main Point: Hospitality is a tangible demonstration of God’s love for our neighbor.

Can you imagine the perfect place to live? If you can, then it most likely is full of “perfect neighbors.” You know, people who are always nice to each other, always helping each other, and never, ever have any disputes *at all* with each other. The reality is none of us probably live among neighbors without the occasional disagreement. Take a moment with your group and see if you can make a list of the top five things that could cause strife and disagreement among neighbors:

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

Now, ask your group to look over their list and ask this question:

“How many things on our list are really serious, major, relationship dealbreakers?”

Bonus – Have a group member (who has prepared in advance) share a “neighboring fail” story to illustrate some of the crazy things that can happen among neighbors.

Listen to your group member’s answers and then say:

“One of the biggest barriers to believers’ “neighboring well” as a means to introduce their neighbors to the Gospel is when they let minor things become major problems.”

Say: “Having an attitude of hospitality, a genuine desire to be a blessing to our neighbors, is the attitude that honors God and a tool that the Lord uses to open doors for conversations.”



BOOK

Main Point: Hospitality is a tangible demonstration of God's love for our neighbor.

Read: Luke 7:33–35 [Read]

Talking Point #1: Hospitality is a tangible way of displaying God's grace to others.

Q: Why would people criticize Jesus for eating with tax collectors and sinners?

Q: Why did Jesus eat with tax collectors and sinners?

You almost can't turn a page of the Gospels without seeing Jesus eating with someone.ⁱ He ate with Pharisees and sinners, tax collectors and fishermen, "notorious" women and the religious elite. Jesus spent a lot of His ministry eating with people, and He ate with *everyone*. In this, Jesus was incredibly unusual for His day. So unusual, in fact, that the religious leaders criticized Him heavily for it. In their culture, dinner parties weren't just a fun thing to do. They were an important element of the social structure. And they certainly weren't "the more the merrier." A very strict code of conduct governed whom you should eat with and why.ⁱⁱ

Meals were one of the ways people expressed honor, gained honor, or lost honor in society. In their culture, each person started with an ascribed honor at birth but gained or lost honor depending on what they did during their lives or even things that happened to them outside of their control. Everything in society was dependent on your honor – whom you could do business with, whom you could marry, etc. Typically, people ate meals only with those who were of the same honor level as them. Even where you sat at a meal was based on honor. The right hand of the host was the place of highest honor and the rest were arranged down the line.

As a well-known rabbi, Jesus enjoyed a position of high honor even though He had been born into a more of a middle-class position as the son of a carpenter. Pharisees who invited Him to dinner were recognizing His honor or giving Him even more honor. By eating with sinners, Jesus was *intentionally giving up* His honor. It was one of the many ways He showed God's love and grace to all people.

In fact, in everything Jesus said and did, in the way He lived and the way He taught, Jesus was "calling off the honor game," as scholar Jerome Neyrey called it. Jesus was telling the world that these levels we create in society are not valid in God's eyes. As Paul would later write, there *is no* slave or free, *no* male or female, *no* Jew or Gentile (all distinctions of honor and dishonor) in the kingdom of God (Galatians 3:28). In His entire ministry, Jesus redefined what real honor looked like, and it wasn't based on social standing.ⁱⁱⁱ



The Pharisees were used to only showing hospitality to those who were like them, on their social level. As we talked about last week, they only believed in showing love to their “neighbor,” while hating their enemies. But as Jesus showed the lawyer, loving your neighbor means showing love to everyone in need; it also means showing hospitality to everyone, regardless of honor. Some Christians think of hospitality as a spiritual gift that some people have and others don’t. But it’s a command given to all believers. It’s in Romans 12, not in the list of spiritual gifts (Romans 12:6–8) but the verses afterward, in Paul’s commands to all Christians, like hating what is evil and being devoted to one another in love. These are not optional things for Christians; they describe the heart and behavior of those who are filled with the Holy Spirit. Peter also included hospitality in a similar context under the command to “love each other deeply” (1 Peter 4:7–11). Both passages show that hospitality is one of the ways we show God’s love to one another. We see it naturally happening in the world around us. We share meals with those we love – our family at Thanksgiving, fun nights out with friends, date nights with our spouse. But as Christians, our banqueting tables shouldn’t stop there. Christian hospitality means reaching out to everyone – strangers, those in need, even our enemies. The same Jesus who calls us to love our enemies also tells us to invite all different kinds of people to our tables for fellowship. Peter even adds that we should offer hospitality *without grumbling* (1 Peter 4:9). Hospitality is an act of love and generosity, and just like our financial giving, it should only be done with a cheerful heart.

The word *hospitality* literally means “to show love to strangers.” It has nothing to do with your house looking as if it were decorated by Martha Stewart or your meal tasting as though Bobby Flay made it. It means making people feel welcome and loved. You can do that in a spotless home, a messy home, at McDonald’s, and even in ways that don’t involve meals. What really matters is that you have a *heart* of hospitality. A heart that welcomes strangers just as Jesus did, the One who came to seek and save the lost, to serve instead of being served, and to give His life as a ransom for many. The heart of every passage about the heavenly banquets of God is not about the kind of food God is serving or how nicely the table is set. It’s about God’s saying, “Come! All are welcome here!” (Revelation 22:17). When Jesus told the parable of the dinner guests, He told the Pharisees, “When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you” (Luke 14:12–14). This was a direct critique of the way they used hospitality as a means of honor instead of a means of grace.

If we want to be like God, our banqueting tables should look like His. God doesn’t have an elite guest list. He throws the doors wide open and says “Come!” to any



and all who will listen – those the world says “deserve” to be invited and those it doesn’t. God’s banqueting table will have former kings sitting next to former homeless drug addicts. Since we are God’s people, our banqueting tables should look the same as His.

Q: Describe any friends you know who are especially good at being welcoming. What specific things do they do to make people feel welcome?

Q: In what ways can you work to be more welcoming in your spheres of influence, not just in your home, but in all places, even online?

Q: If hospitality is showing love to strangers, which strangers in your life is God calling you to show hospitality to? (It doesn’t necessarily have to be someone you’ve never met. It may be someone you don’t know very well.)

Read: Luke 7:36–39 and 44–46 [Read]

Talking Point #2: Hospitality is an invitation to a relationship.

Q: Why was Simon so upset about this woman’s touching Jesus?

Q: What does his attitude have to do with hospitality?

We’ve been hearing for years about how good it is for a family to have regular meals together. Children who have regular family dinners have better vocabularies and read earlier, get better grades, and have a healthier diet, even later as adults. They have a lower rate of teen risk behaviors, lower rates of depression, a more positive view of the future, less stress, and a better relationship with their parents. But that is only true if the dinners include interpersonal connection. Those statistics don’t hold if the parents spend the dinner yelling at each other or scolding the kids, or if everyone watches TV or stares at their phones the whole time.^{iv}

Just as sharing meals connects families, it can connect us with our friends and neighbors, too. We all instinctively know this, don’t we? Isn’t that why we invite friends over for dinner or to meet for lunch or coffee? Eating and drinking with someone is a sign of relationship.

Two relationships are contrasted in this story – between Jesus and Simon and Jesus and the woman. Luke makes an intentional parallel. When Simon the Pharisee invited Jesus to dinner, he was showing Jesus honor by the standards of their society, but then Jesus pointed out that the woman who anointed His feet, a shameful sinner, actually showed Him more *real* honor than Simon had. Simon’s relationship with Jesus was shallow and really just about himself. Simon would have gained



honor by having a famous rabbi in his home, by being associated with Him. Or he may have even been using the opportunity to trap Him, as many of the Pharisees had been doing. He didn't believe Jesus was really a prophet (v. 39).^v It is unlikely that he actually wanted to learn from or follow Jesus, considering he didn't show Jesus any of the basic respect when He arrived, such as kissing Him in greeting, giving Him water to wash his feet, or anointing His head with oil (v. 44–46). These were things a host usually did for all his guests, the customary elements of hospitality, yet Simon did none of them. Simon's reception of Jesus had been a cold and discourteous one, not one of love, respect, and authentic relationship.^{vi}

Yet the woman obviously loved Jesus with her whole heart. Her actions were ones of extravagant worship and complete societal impropriety! It was not unusual for uninvited persons to enter a home in which a dinner was being given to sit along the wall and observe. But the fact that *this* woman, a known sinner, entered the home of a strict Pharisee was surprising. Overcome with sorrow for her own sin and gratitude for His grace, she did what no woman of those days was supposed to do in public – she let down her hair.^{vii} Luke used the imperfect tense to describe her continual weeping, wiping, kissing, and anointing, suggesting she carried on for an uncomfortably long period of time. Pastor and author Charles Swindoll writes, "Her actions depict worship so profuse and so unrestrained as to border on self-humiliation. In the ancient Near East, only the lowest slaves touched the feet of another, almost always for washing. A woman's hair represented her dignity (1 Corinthians 11:6, 15) and, if married, she never took it down in public. So, the woman's hair touching Jesus' feet represented the most extreme act of humility possible."^{viii}

She anointed Him with a costly and fragrant perfume, not just olive oil. Mark and John added that it was pure nard, a highly prized extract from the spikenard plant, native to India and imported at great expense.^{ix} Makoto Fujimura, founder of the International Arts Movement, said, "What she has done is beautiful and enduring *because* it is ephemeral, *because* it is useless, *because* it's a waste. God somehow demands of us so much more than this transactional nature. It is really about the gift that we've been given, and the only response we can give back is with extravagance, with gratuitous beauty."^x This type of jar had a long neck and a very slow drip. To pour out its contents like this, all at once, means the neck had to be broken – broken as she was, as we are in our own sin – as we are when we finally come to Jesus.^{xi}

This woman saw her own brokenness and offered thanks to Jesus for His love and grace. Simon, on the other hand, did not see his brokenness and only sat in judgment of both the woman and of Jesus. The woman came to Jesus with humility, gratitude and worship. Simon came to Jesus with self-righteousness and cynicism. Their relationships with Jesus were completely different, and it is the woman's



relationship that Jesus praised. Jesus has invited us all into relationship with Him, and we have an opportunity to help facilitate that relationship with Jesus by reaching out to our neighbors with hospitality. When we open our homes and our hearts to people, we open the opportunity for an authentic relationship with them, which can lead to an authentic relationship with Jesus. Since our whole culture recognizes eating together as a point of connection in building relationships, showing hospitality is one of the most natural and effective ways to reach our neighbors for Jesus.

While you *can* stand on the street corners and hand out tracts or go door to door sharing the Gospel, building authentic relationships with people first and then speaking from the heart about your own personal faith and how Jesus has changed your life has proven to be much more effective. Young Life calls this “earning the right to be heard.” In his book, *Discover Your Mission Now*, pastor Dave Ferguson gives us a great acronym for a method we can use to build authentic relationships with people rather than treating them as “projects” for evangelism. It spells “bless” because of the promise God made to Abraham – that He would bless Abraham so he could be a blessing to the world (Genesis 12:1–3). B—begin with prayer. L—listen. E—eat. S—serve. S—share your story. The first three steps are focused on relationship building, including *eating* together – hospitality. Step 4 is serving others. It is not until step 5 that we share the Gospel – only *after* we have built an authentic relationship and shown our love through service.^{xii} When we invite people to our tables, we build relationships and make connections that may eventually lead to inviting them to *the* table – to the Lord’s table in worship and the table of the great wedding feast in the age to come.

Q: Share a time when someone was more receptive to hearing the Gospel after you or another person had “earned the right to be heard.”

Q: How many authentic relationships do you have with people who are far from Jesus? How can you either build more relationships or build those relationships deeper?

Q: Think about people in your life who are far from Jesus. How can you reach out to them in hospitality this week? It doesn’t have to be an elaborate dinner party. It may be as simple as a phone call or an invitation to coffee. Just focus on building relationship.

Luke 7: 40–50 [Read]

Talking Point #3: Hospitality is a picture of heaven.

Q: Why did Jesus say the woman loved Him more?



Q: How is welcoming everyone to our table a picture of the banqueting table in heaven?

As we said above, Jesus welcomed all people to His table. He ate with everyone – tax collectors and Pharisees, rich and poor. When Jesus described God’s future banqueting table in heaven, He described a table filled with the lame, the crippled, the blind and the poor – all people with a very low honor status in the eyes of someone like Simon. When we read a story like this, we easily get Jesus’ theological point. But in that culture, with people who so valued honor and social standing, it would have been absolutely *shocking* for Jesus to praise this sinful woman over Simon. The impact is somewhat lost unless you understand the deep value they had for honor.

In their culture, honor determined a person’s worth. But Jesus taught and showed that *every* human being has inherent worth in God’s eyes. He valued children, who were considered nothing more than property in their culture. He spoke to the Samaritan woman at the well, who had very little ascribed honor because she was a woman and a Samaritan, and who lost even more honor by being a “known sinner.” He showed love and care for lepers, the blind, the poor, the sinners, and the outcast. He chose fishermen and tax collectors to be His closest disciples. These actions weren’t random. Jesus was making a very bold statement – *all* are welcome at God’s banqueting table.

A few chapters later, at another banquet at the home of another Pharisee, a ruler of the Pharisees, one of the men said to Jesus, “Blessed is the one who will eat bread in the kingdom of God.” Jesus answered with another parable about a dinner party. All of the “honorable” people rejected the host’s invitation, so he filled his table with the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame, anyone who would come (Luke 14:15–24). Both in this story and that one, Jesus was telling these Pharisees that they would be surprised at what the banqueting table in the kingdom of heaven looked like. Perhaps even angry about it, as Simon was.

Jesus taught that “the last shall be first.” It sounds great to those who are “last” in this world, but it’s a much harder thing for those who are “first” in this world. For the same reason it was hard for the rich young ruler to hear Jesus’s requirements to enter the kingdom, it would have been very hard for the Pharisees to hear that the banqueting table of God would include the poor, crippled, blind and lame. That doesn’t mean that a rich or powerful person or a person of very high honor *can’t* follow Jesus. Just look at the apostle Paul. When it came to the honor system of their culture, he had every reason to consider himself worthy (Philippians 3:4–6). Yet, Paul said that he considered it all garbage compared to knowing Christ. None of it mattered because he understood what honor really means in the kingdom of God.



Throughout Scripture, heaven is described as a grand banquet. Isaiah described it as a feast of rich food with the best meats and the finest wines (Isaiah 25). Revelation calls it a wedding feast, which in the ancient world would have been the most lavish celebration the family could afford, lasting for a week (Revelation 19). And as the wedding feast of the Son of God, the King of kings, that's more lavish than we could ever imagine! David wrote that at God's table, we will sit with our former enemies (Psalm 23). God's banqueting table will be the most lavish feast anyone has ever seen and open to all who respond to His invitation – the honorable of the world and the dishonorable. When we open our homes and our lives to all people, including the poor, the sick, the marginalized, those the world considers dishonorable, our tables will be a picture of the final banqueting table in the kingdom of God.

As God's people, we should have that same heart of hospitality that makes *everyone* feel welcome and loved. Hospitality is a requirement for all Christians because it reflects the heart of God. It's not a good deed on some checklist. It's the natural outflow of a heart that loves people as God loves them. Hospitality is about welcoming strangers. It doesn't matter if it's in your home (immaculate or otherwise) or out at a restaurant, if it's a homecooked meal, a pizza delivered to your door, or just grabbing a cup of coffee. What matters is opening your heart and making someone else feel welcome – spending time together, building relationship, and loving them as Jesus loves them, specifically showing hospitality to those who are different from us or who are in need in any way – physically, emotionally or spiritually. Eating a meal with someone may not seem like a super evangelistic thing to do, but it's a great way to show someone he or she is loved. This could one day lead to this person's knowing he or she is loved by God, too.

Q: Think about your circle of friends and loved ones. Does your life reflect the diversity of the banqueting table of God? If not, how can you change that?

Q: Consider your own personality, gifts, talents, resources and circles of influence. How can you personally show hospitality to those in need?

Q: Think of several objections people may have to the idea of offering hospitality to strangers, such as "I'm an introvert," or "I can't cook," etc. Discuss ways to overcome these objections.



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WEEK 2



TOOK

Main Point: Hospitality is a tangible demonstration of God's love for our neighbor.

You and I are responsible to be ambassadors to God's kingdom. The call to be like Jesus includes many different objectives and standards that Christians must live up to in order to be living a godly life. Hospitality is one that is often overlooked as a result of our individualistic American culture. Rather than thinking about how you can be comfortable in certain situations, recognize the people around you and what their needs are. That is where we see our objective line up with the character of Jesus. Jesus is concerned with the condition of others more than His own condition. Look toward some of the thoughts below to see how you can better orient yourself toward this ethic of the kingdom.

THINK: What does it mean to be truly hospitable to everyone, not just to people we would naturally hang out with? How can you show Christian hospitality to strangers, to people who are different from you, to those in need? How can we as a church community show hospitality to strangers and those who are in need?

PRAY: For God to show you how to reach out to people in hospitality and love. Ask Him to show you whom you need to reach out to. Ask Him to put people in your path who need to know Him and give you the eyes to see how you can love them. Pray for those you know who are far from God. Pray for God to give you a heart of hospitality to all people. (**Distribute REACH cards.**)

ACT: After praying, choose one person whom God is calling you to reach out to with Christian hospitality. Invite that person to share a cup of coffee or a meal with you to simply build relationship and reach out to him or her in love. You don't have to talk about anything serious or even bring up Jesus. Just get to know that person and spend more time listening than talking.



Bonus – Give your group a “neighboring challenge.”

Ask your group members to meet at least three of their neighbors this week and, when they do, challenge them to find a way to ask their neighbors if there is anything they can do to serve them in a tangible way. Encourage your group to use this encounter as a first step toward building a relationship that could lead to a Gospel conversation.



- ⁱRobert J. Karris, *Eating Your Way through Luke's Gospel* (Collegeville, MN: Order of St. Benedict, 2006).
- ⁱⁱJerome H. Neyrey, *Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998).
- ⁱⁱⁱJerome H. Neyrey, *Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998).
- ^{iv}Anne Fishel, "The Most Important Thing You Can Do With Your Kids? Eat Dinner with Them" *The Washington Post*, Jan 12, 2015 - HYPERLINK "<https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2015/01/12/the-most-important-thing-you-can-do-with-your-kids-eat-dinner-with-them/>" <https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2015/01/12/the-most-important-thing-you-can-do-with-your-kids-eat-dinner-with-them/>
- ^vCharles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Luke* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Publishers, 2012).
- ^{vi}William Hendricksen, *Luke, New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1978).
- ^{vii}William Hendricksen, *Luke, New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1978).
- ^{viii}Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Luke* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Publishers, 2012).
- ^{ix}Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Luke* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Publishers, 2012).
- ^x"The Economy of Wonder" (video) *For the Life of the World, Vol 6* - HYPERLINK "<https://www.letterstotheexiles.com/>" <https://www.letterstotheexiles.com/>
- ^{xi}William Hendricksen, *Luke, New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1978).
- ^{xii}Dave Ferguson, *Discover Your Mission Now* (Chicago, IL: Community Christian Church, 2014)

