

FORMED BY HOSPITALITY



the way of friendship in a world of hardship



Passion Creek
CHURCH

**Formed by Hospitality:
the way of friendship in a world of hardship**

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JESUS & HOSPITALITY

Jesus was no stranger to a good meal.

All throughout the Gospels Jesus is described eating, feasting, and partying with common people. Jesus is almost always going to a meal, at a meal, or coming from a meal.¹ He dined with his disciples regularly, ate with outcasts graciously, and partied with sinners audaciously.

The early church adopted this practice as well. The book of Acts tells us that the first followers of Jesus made it a regular habit to break bread from house to house, eating with “*joyful and sincere hearts*.”² And as the meals spread, so did the gospel.

But for Jesus and his followers, a meal was about more than just food; it was a means of grace. Meals were a way for the Son of God to come near people and offer conversation, friendship, and healing. Every dinner shared with a sinner was a way for God himself to extend a merciful hand of salvation to those who least deserved it. If the mission of God was to seek and save the lost, then meals were the method.

Jesus even institutes the practice of communion as a meal. When we partake in communion, we’re eating a meal together. We’re reminding ourselves that through his sacrifice, fellowship, and hospitality, God has cleared a space at his table for us. Taking communion is our way of feasting with our Savior.

The practice of hospitality is creating space over a meal with saints, strangers, and sinners to experience the loving grace of God.

Author and theologian Rosaria Butterfield calls this “*radically ordinary hospitality: using your Christian home in a daily way that seeks to make strangers neighbors, and neighbors family of God.*”³

At Passion Creek, we’re increasingly convinced that evangelism and outreach are more effective when we stop making demonstrations out of people and start making dinner for people.

What if sharing the gospel looked more like serving dinner than coercing and arguing? What if we were known more for how we treated our neighbors across the street than anything else? What if our dinner tables were transformed into places where people weren’t preached at, but where they still experienced the grace of God over a good meal? What if our homes became places where relationships were restored and love was modeled? Where sinful people were not affirmed, but accepted? This is the practice of hospitality.

This hospitality guide is a means to that end. We want to help you share the good news with saints, strangers, and sinners by first sharing a meal.

HOW TO PRACTICE HOSPITALITY

Inviting someone over to your home for dinner likely sounds incredibly intimidating, but it doesn't have to be. At its core, practicing hospitality is simply eating with people. This doesn't require the most expensive home, exceptional culinary skills, or even an enormous space. Anyone can practice hospitality, and we want to help you do that with as little worry as possible. To that end, this guide is full of tips and ideas to practice hospitality, and hospitality certainly isn't limited to only something that happens over a meal. But if you'd like to try inviting someone over for a meal, here's a basic step-by-step way to do it. You can use this template in any context and with any community to invite others into fellowship over a meal and have a meaningful time together:

1. Start with prayer.

The key marker of Christian hospitality is that it's a way for us to extend the love and grace of God to others. Spend some time reflecting on the people you know, both inside and outside of our church community, and ask the Holy Spirit to bring people to mind who you could invite over for a meal.

2. Extend an invite.

This part is simple: invite them to share a meal! If you're able, have them over to your home for dinner. If that's impossible for you, start small — ask them to share a meal at a favorite restaurant.

3. Prepare.

This step is important. To make this an intentional practice, you'll have to do a little bit of work beforehand. On the following pages you'll find some quick tips on how to prepare your space and make the most of your time, no matter what your home or cooking skills look like. But for now, consider making some basic preparations like tidying your dining space, making the environment welcoming, and having some conversation topics and questions ready to go.

4. Serve, don't entertain.

As you share this time with the people you've invited, practice what author Priya Parker calls generous authority: "*[hosting] in a way that serves your guests.*"⁴ Your goal isn't to entertain your guests, it's to serve them generously. Bring up the conversation topics you've prepared, or consider making some rules like leaving your phones on the table or not talking about work. Again, make the most of this time by finding intentional ways to extend the grace of God to your guests by serving them. Ask questions to get to know your guests deeper, and listen more than you talk. Share stories, jokes, and anecdotes so long as they break down barriers and make your guests feel comfortable. If an opportunity arises, share about something God is doing in your life or just offer to pray over the meal and your guests.

5. End with honor.

One of the best ways to end your time is to intentionally speak truth over your guests by honoring them. As you end your meal or as your guests are about to leave, consider a few things you're grateful for about them and share that with them. Be specific and honest. This may feel awkward to you, but it will be received well and will make your time both meaningful and memorable.

How to host a space

If you're having someone over for dinner, the space you're bringing them into will set the tone of the entire meal. Consider the following principles when preparing your space for hospitality:

1. Environment & ambience.

Be aware of the mood and atmosphere of your space. Think about cleanliness, but also ambience. Have some light music playing to break awkward silence. Consider what author Christine Pohl calls "*characteristics of hospitable places.*"⁵

- 1. Comfortable and lived in.**
- 2. Not always aesthetic or beautiful, but cared for.**
- 3. Safe, stable, and allowing for people to rest.**
- 4. Not frenetic, but slow.**
- 5. Natural and lived-in, not forced.**

2. Conference room vs. dining room.

Everyone brings assumptions and follows unwritten scripts based on their environments. When you walk into a conference room, you know that the CEO sits at the head of the table and everyone else follows a hierarchy.⁶ But at a dinner table, everyone should be treated as family. Keep this in mind as you prepare the dinner space. Have plenty of chairs, and think about issues you'd want to avoid if you were a guest in someone else's home. Lastly, be aware of how your relationships with others who live in your home can affect the feel of a space. Guests can often feel tension between family members or spouses, even if nothing is said or done while they're there.

How to host a conversation

Another way to prepare for hospitality is to know how to host a conversation. Consider these tips as you prepare to fill your time:

1. Take over.

Practice generous authority. As the host, your guests will expect you to guide and lead conversation. Don't be afraid to ask questions or guide the conversation a certain way. Think of some topics beforehand, and ask plenty of questions.

2. Don't shy away from small talk.

Small talk is a form of hospitality. It's a way for people to let their guard down and gain trust with who they're talking to. It might seem simple and meaningless, but talking about the weather or how your week has been may open the door to deeper conversation and alleviate any tension your guests might feel. It can't be said enough — ask questions!

3. Don't shy away from deep talk.

At the same time, don't be afraid to lean into deeper conversations. You can bring up meaningful topics by asking about someone's life growing up, their dreams and hopes for the future, or about their career. Again, the goal is to serve your guests. Find ways to encourage, honor, and love the people you're sharing the conversation with, and practice being fully present to them and the moment.

Hospitality in all seasons

Some of us feel unequipped, ill-prepared, or altogether resistant to practicing this type of hospitality due to the season of life we're in. Here are some suggested tips and practices for hospitality in any season of life.

1. As a young or unmarried person.

It might be tempting to ignore this practice as a single person, but there are so many opportunities to learn from and serve those older or in a different season of life than you.

Consider reaching out to someone in your workplace, family, or church that you'd like to learn from and invite them to a meal. Ask questions about areas of your life you'd like to grow in like your career, relationships, or life with God.

Reach out to a family with young children and offer to cook dinner while the children play. Couples with young children can feel lonely or afraid to reach out, but they often long for a space where they can relax while also enjoying connections with others.

2. Young children.

It might seem impossible to entertain guests with babies and toddlers crawling and running around. But you can do a great service to others by inviting them into the regular and chaotic rhythms of your life.

Consider reaching out to single people, older people, or childless families and inviting them into your home. You can set the expectations by explaining how chaotic it might be, but many older, single, and childless people

would love to embrace the chaos and be a part of a regular family rhythm.

Invite other families with children over to your home so the kids can play, and you can chat. This is a great way to develop comradery with those in your same life stage, learn from those farther along in their parenting journey than you, or serve those newer to parenting than you.

3. Limited space.

Hospitality might seem intimidating if you have a small dining room, kitchen, or home. It's easy to believe the lie that your value is based on your material wealth. But you don't have to have a large dining room or kitchen to eat with people. Much of the early church made a consistent practice of hospitality simply by repurposing their spaces and making the most of the room they had.

If you're limited on dining space or have a small home/apartment, consider simple ways to rearrange your furniture in a living room or patio to accommodate for a few guests.

Order pizza or takeout rather than cook if you don't have a large kitchen.

Invest in a foldable table, a clean tablecloth, and a few chairs that you can bring out when having guests over.

4. No cooking ability or limited resources.

There are plenty of simple, quick, and cheap recipes online. Everybody loves a good quesadilla. But the point of hospitality isn't to entertain someone with a good meal, it's to serve someone with a good time.

Order pizza or takeout and prep some good conversation topics.

Host a game or movie night.

Invite a few people over and have them bring something to share, like a potluck. Keep in mind however, you're still the host. Be intentional with the conversation and look for other ways to serve your guests, even if it's just through honor and encouragement.

5. As someone in their second half of life.

If you're in your later years, it might be tempting to ignore this practice as well. But you can serve those younger and older than you by both inviting and investing in them.

Consider reaching out to someone younger and getting to know them so you can invest in their life. Wisdom is given to be shared, so think about who you can share your life and experiences with.

Reach out to someone else in our community who's also in your season of life to maintain community.

FEASTING WITH THE SAINTS

When the people of God are described throughout the Bible, they're most often described as a family. And when family gathers together for dinner, they share more than just a meal. They share life, stories, laughter, questions, tragedies, and celebrations. Throughout the scriptures, the people of God use meals to mark this kind of fellowship.

The art of eating together with those we're close to is a lost one. Meals have been commodified and looked over as nothing more than a relieving break from the mundanity of work at best, or an inconvenient break in our daily rhythms at worst. We might enjoy an occasional date night, birthday celebration, or holiday feast, but the regular practice of sharing life at a table is one that fewer and fewer people in the West are participating in.

For Christians to recapture this lost tradition, we must intentionally make space in our schedules to be hospitable toward those in our community. Feasting regularly with other followers of the way encourages us, strengthens our bonds, and nourishes our souls. Many argue that the early church even shared communion each week as a part of a full meal.⁷

This part of hospitality we're going to explore together is feasting with the saints. Following are several intentional practices to help you engage in hospitality with those within our church community, ordered from easiest to more challenging.

Practices

Very Easy

Come early and stay late after church to engage in intentional conversation. Catch up with someone you haven't seen in a while, or reach out to meet someone you've never talked to before.

Easy

Find someone who's sitting by themselves at church or someone you've never met before and invite them to lunch after the service.

Moderate

Invite someone or a few people you already know from church to your home for dinner. Use this as an opportunity to practice hosting as well as a chance to get to know those in your community on a deeper level. Because this practice is happening churchwide, you likely won't catch your guests off guard by engaging in deeper talk. Use some of these questions to spark deeper conversations:

What was your life like growing up?

What's one thing God is teaching you in this season of life?

What's something specific we can pray about for you?

Hard

Invite someone or a few people who you don't know that well from church to your home for dinner. Think of people who are in a different life stage than you, someone who might be in need, or just someone you've never spoken to before. Again, use this as a chance to practice hosting, and avoid the temptation to entertain them.

Very Hard

Have dinner with someone who has hurt you and practice reconciliation. The early church would often confess sins and hurts with one another before partaking in the meal, so use this as an opportunity to reconcile with others.⁸ Be clear on why you want to share dinner, and let them know you intend to talk about the hurt so you don't catch them off guard. Think of friends, family members, or anyone else in your community who you might be holding a grudge against, and serve them dinner.

FEASTING WITH THE STRANGER

If “*loving your neighbor as yourself*” was the second most important commandment in the scriptures according to Jesus, then it’s something we should make a regular part of our day-to-day life.⁹ But in our hyper-individualistic and self-serving culture, few of us actually get to know the strangers we interact with on a daily basis.

Jesus and his disciples faced similar issues in their day. Loving their neighbors was difficult because of boundary lines and discrimination that occurred between Jews and Gentiles. Later in the biblical story, the early church faced violent opposition and persecution due to their commitment to King Jesus. And yet, the more meals they shared with their “*enemies*,” the more their enemies became friends. Over time, those friends became part of the family of God.

Henri Nouwen defines hospitality this way: “*the creation of a free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy.*”¹⁰ People will always expect our hostility until they experience our hospitality. By getting to know the neighbors in our lives, even our actual neighborhood neighbors, we create spaces and opportunities to serve those around us and demonstrate the love of God.

In this part of our hospitality practice, we’re going to create opportunities to intentionally get to know the strangers in our lives. Again, these practices are ordered from easiest to hardest, so try committing to something challenging but doable. As you decide, remember that the Holy Spirit who empowered the first followers of Jesus to grow the Kingdom through hospitality is the same Spirit that empowers you.

Practices

Very Easy

Have a conversation with a neighbor. Just say hi to the person walking their dog, checking their mail, or taking out the trash. Consider going on a walk around your block or to a neighborhood park with the purpose of striking up a conversation with someone you've never met before.

Easy

Put a firepit in your front yard, and be open to interruptions. It's a great time of year to be outside, and plenty of people are more likely to engage in conversation during this cooler weather. Say hi to people on a walk or to others who might be hanging out outside. If you live in an apartment, spend some time hanging out in the public areas like around a public firepit or in the lobby. Again, the idea here is simply to have a conversation with someone you don't know.

Moderate

Know the names and needs of your neighbors who live in front and next to you. Find ways to get to know the people living in close proximity to you and then make an effort to meet those needs.. Consider ways to strike up meaningful conversations and learn about who your neighbors really are in ways that you can't just by waving from your driveway.

Hard

Invite someone who doesn't go to church over to your house for dinner and invite them to church. Think of someone you know but might not know too well. This could be a neighbor, a co-worker, or just an acquaintance in your relational network. Keep the dinner low-key,

and don't feel any pressure to give a full gospel presentation. Simply have a good meal and end with an invitation to join you at church on Sunday. Use the tips on the previous pages to make the most of your time and some of these "get-to-know-you" questions to help guide the conversation:

What do you do for work?

What are some things you enjoy doing outside of work?

How long have you lived in Arizona? Do you like it here?

Very Hard

Throw a neighborhood block party. This sounds intimidating, but this could be as easy as having an open BBQ in a neighborhood park and inviting others to come. Take advantage of any neighborhood Facebook group you can join, or just invite those who live right in front of or next to you. Visit artofneighboring.com/resources for an easy "how-to" block party guide.

FEASTING WITH THE SINNER

Many of Jesus' interactions with the lost happened over a meal. In Matthew 11:19, Jesus is accused of being *"a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners."*

The Gospel of Luke illustrates this well: In Luke 5, Jesus is described dining with tax collectors and sinners at a man named Levi's house. Jesus is anointed by a Samaritan woman while eating at a Pharisee's home in Luke 7. And when Jesus forgives and restores Zacchaeus, the Jewish tax collector in Luke 19, he first invites himself over for a meal. Bottom line: Jesus' proximity to those living counter to the way of God was scandalous to the self-righteous and life-giving to the self-rejecting. Again, if seeking and saving the lost was his mission, then sharing a meal with them was his method.

As Jesus' disciples, we're instructed to do the same. By practicing hospitality, we create a safe space for those opposed to the way of Jesus to encounter and experience the love of God. We don't affirm people's sin, but we do affirm that they're loved and valued image-bearers of God.

You likely know someone who's far from God. Family members, friends, or close co-workers. What if God has put these people in your life for you to bring them close to God by bringing them close to you? What if sharing the gospel is as simple as sharing a meal? Following are several practices to help guide you as you seek to serve the lost.

Practices

Very Easy

Have an intentional conversation with someone you know who's far from God. Don't feel any pressure to bring up the gospel or argue about their beliefs. Simply have a conversation to show them that you care about them. Consider reaching out and asking questions about how they're doing, about any major updates in their life, or even if there are some things you can pray for.

Easy

Invite someone you know who's lost out to lunch or dinner at a restaurant and have intentional conversation to get to know them. This is different from the last practice in that rather than just a conversation, you're sharing a meal with them in a neutral space. Ask them questions about their life, their beliefs, or anything else that will demonstrate you wish to really get to know them.

Moderate

Invite someone you know who's lost to your home for dinner. Again, this is a step harder. Rather than meeting in a neutral space like a restaurant, inviting them to your home creates a more intimate environment to get to know them. Think of someone who might be open to the way of Jesus, but isn't currently following him. This time, feel no pressure to bring up spiritual conversation. Just host them and serve them.

Hard

Invite someone you know who follows another religion to your home for dinner to get to know them and their beliefs. This time when you invite them, preface by explaining that you'd like to get to know more

about what they believe. During lunch or dinner, ask questions about their spiritual background, upbringing, and theology. More often than not, people love explaining their worldview to those who show genuine interest and curiosity.

Very Hard

Invite someone you know who's far from God and hostile to the way of Jesus to your home for dinner. This time, think of someone who's actively opposed to the way of Jesus. Don't feel any pressure to present the gospel unless there's a clear opportunity. Simply serve them, get to know them, and demonstrate the love of God to them.

Remember, people will always expect our hostility until they experience our hospitality.

ADDITIONAL TIPS & PRACTICES

Hospitality is a practice that includes far more than just a meal. Here are some additional practices and ideas to demonstrate hospitality to those around you:

Saints

Commit to going to lunch with someone each week after church on Sundays.

Sit with someone new during service.

Practice Sabbath with others in our church community by sharing a meal or doing fun activities together.

If you're running errands, invite someone along.

Create a playdate with other moms or dads in our community.

Host interest groups like reading clubs, movie nights, or game nights for others in our community to join.

Strangers

Frequent a restaurant and get to know the staff and waiters' names and needs.

Join a public club like golf, pickleball, or a neighborhood reading club.

Get to know people in the public places you frequent: grocery stores, restaurants, gyms, parks, etc.

Find other ways to invite people into what you do for fun: watch sports, play games, read books, see movies, etc.

Reach out to those in need and serve them by inviting them to your home for dinner. Think about single moms or dads, young college students, those in poverty, or those in their later years and need of community.

Sinners

Prayer walk your neighborhood or workplace and ask God for opportunities to reach the lost in these areas.

Meet regularly with someone far from God to deepen your relationship with them.

Reach out to a someone you know who is pulling away from you and/or God or just living in isolation. Take over a meal and check on them.

Find ways to serve those far from God that you know: help financially if they need it, make and deliver meals if they're sick, or just reach out when you know they're having a hard time.

RECOMMENDED READING

The Gospel Comes With a House Key

by Rosaria Butterfield

A Meal With Jesus

by Tim Chester

Find Your People

by Jennie Allen

Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition

by Christine Pohl

Made for People

by Justin Whitmel Earley

The Art of Gathering

by Priya Parker

ENDNOTES

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