

Radical Hospitality  
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Mark Statler

## **Faith is always contagious**

Faith is always contagious. It's contagious in either a good or a bad way!

God's design is that our faith will work along with his spirit. Jesus once said, "...**when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself**". (John 12:32 TNIV). God's design is that we assist in drawing people. We talked about that last week...using our actions and words....

But too often, faith is contagious in a not so good way, and we need to take a look at this. Sometimes people see our actions as people of faith and say, "If that's what it means to follow Christ, no thanks.", like faith is the plague or something that will seriously mess you up.

College incident – Freshmen year, looking for place to belong, etc. Went to the campus ministry group and listened to them judge and gripe about those people; those people who drink, who smoke pot, who cuss. I was so disgusted that.... And then I became one of "those people". It was four years before I looked at Jesus as an option again for my life.

People experience what I'm going to call a plague-like faith when they see us gossip and judge others; when they see us living out sustained hypocrisy (we all have it, I just mean obviously not connecting faith to life repeatedly). They also see it when we become exclusive.

People feel excluded not only by being intentionally ignored or left out, but also when it appears that no one cares. Elaborate.

To feel excluded here at Saint Paul's might feel like walking into the lobby 10 minutes before the service, stand in the lobby for 5 more minutes and then get all the way into the Worship Center without one person saying hello. This happened! I know for a fact – it was my neighbor, that I invited.

My experience in another area church.(elaborate) They didn't care if I was there or not.

These kinds of experiences make people say, "I don't belong here – and they don't want me to belong here." Often times, that leads to a negative spiritual experience because if God's people don't care to welcome me and include me, then I must not matter to God".

## **Hospitality is God's Idea.**

Hospitality is the anti-viral to plague like faith. Hospitality invites, welcomes and includes people into an experience of God's grace in Christian community. Being hospitable means actively pursuing ways to include people.

In every Newcomer's class we go through what we call core values at Saint Paul's. These are faith values – help us define what authentic faith looks and acts like. One of them is "That we

would see people the way God sees them". If we can see people as God sees them, people God loves, people worthy of Jesus gifts of forgiveness and grace; people Jesus would be sure to include. This core value is connected to several biblical passages.

**Matthew 25:35 (TNIV)** - For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in,

**Romans 15:7 (TNIV)** - Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

**Hebrews 13:2 (TNIV)** - Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.

Hospitality is God's idea. Hospitality is God welcoming you just where you are. Hospitality is extending God's acceptance of us, God's welcome and God's love out into our world – wherever we go.

It's way beyond just being friendly or just saying hello. I think in our world we tend to water down hospitality to being friendly, amicable, or adequately prepared for guests. But that is not a biblical picture of hospitality.

Our spiritual ancestors (Israel and early church) viewed hospitality as a sacred duty. When Jesus said, "I was a stranger and you invited me in" there was something radical in that comment, but it was not the idea of welcoming God when we welcome someone else. That was firmly established. The radical part of that statement for Jesus' audience was saying that we welcome him, equating himself with God.

### **Biblical Hospitality is about exceeding needs.**

Because inviting, welcoming and including others is a sacred duty, is something that we also do for God, then we cannot be satisfied with just "being friendly, amicable, or adequately prepared". It has to go way beyond that!

There is a passage in Luke where Jesus is talking about prayer. In fact, it follows Luke's version of the Lord's Prayer. Jesus wants to teach his followers to pray with boldness, and to illustrate what kind of boldness he means, he uses the well understood code of hospitality, of going to excess.

***Then Jesus said to them, "Suppose you have a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him.' And suppose the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity he will surely get up and give you as much as you need.*** (Luke 11:5-8)

If you're like me, then this story makes you scratch your head a bit...

Here's the setting... It's the middle of the night, the daily supply of bread baked earlier is gone or nearly gone and an unexpected visitor shows up. If you're like me, then you're saying, "Why wouldn't the guest just accept that whatever was left would have to do? What's the big

deal?”

Because, if you are not just welcoming someone, you are “entertaining angels” as the author of Hebrews put it, then just setting out what is left is not good enough. In fact, setting out what you think is adequate is not enough!

Biblical Hospitality is not about meeting needs, it is about exceeding them! That’s why....

You (notice Jesus puts this in very personal terms) get up and go to your friend’s house in the middle of the night and ask for help. Your house in the ancient world, would not be like your house. You couldn’t go to the door in your robe, quietly sneak to the kitchen, gather up some stuff and send your friend on their way. You probably have one room and everyone is sleeping in it and they are all going to be disrupted because of your need, so your friend is a little put out because you were not adequately prepared to deal with this possibility.

Jesus ends up saying, that your friend will not be motivated to get up and help you just because that’s your friend. That’s what Jesus is saying when he says you have a “shameless audacity“. Because your friend understands that you are motivated by the code of excessive hospitality and that your good name is at stake that you will receive the help you need.

Adequate or good-enough is not good enough when it comes to inviting, welcoming and including people in Jesus’ name! Biblical hospitality is not about meeting needs, it is about exceeding them!

### **Biblical Hospitality is purposeful and radical**

That’s why we’re talking about radical hospitality. Radical means, “drastically different from normal practice; going the second mile (Jesus would say), or take welcoming the stranger to the max.

Dan Cathy - Chick Fil A - second mile looks like

Not making people wait at counter for their food,  
Clean tables and Chairs  
Fresh flowers on tables  
Servers who will get your drink refill for you.

### **How can our church practice radical hospitality?**

Around here, (we could probably be more radical) that looks like this....

1. First Impressions Teams to help greet and welcome and guide guests....way more than just passing out programs and taking up the offering. This team helps us prepare for guests...set out food, hold doors open, look for people who may need direction, walk them wherever they need to go, clean bathrooms (should be doing that right now), clean up messes, mission is to take the love and acceptance Jesus has for everyone in here as far out toward the parking lot as possible. Team uses the phrase to “wow” people....just a way of saying that hospitality is so important to God and to us, that we want to welcome and include our guests in a way that exceeds their expectations. We want our guests to intuitively sense that “These people really care about me. They want what’s best for me...they want to me experience God today.”

INVITE TO SERVE WITH THIS TEAM.

2. Everyone who calls this church their home needs to have a vision to invite, welcome, and include new people! This is so important that we teach it in our Newcomer’s class. I’ve been here 4 years...I know Aaron was including this before I got here, so everyone for I’m not sure how long now has been taught that a minimal standard for following Jesus at Saint Paul’s is to be a

welcomer...have the spirit an attitude that worship and life are not just about you and your needs and comforts, but are about setting aside your needs and desires, and even your favorite seat to help someone else experience God here.

Might look like: Helping someone find the children's check in or locating a staff person who can help answer a question or introducing yourself to someone you don't know who's standing alone in the lobby, helping them get a cup of coffee or helping out the single parent whose coming in with toddlers and diaper bags...

3. Any small group, Sunday school class, or home group you are in needs to always be ready to invite and welcome new people in ways that exceed their expectations. (Elaborate - take time to do introductions and bring them up to date with what your group is doing, invite to have coffee and get to know them better).

Even though we have our First Impressions Teams and we are teaching that we all need to extend hospitality, we still don't always get it right. We need to realize that there are people who do not experience our church as warm and friendly. One very rainy Sunday, one first time guest was leaving the worship center in a hurry. One of our team members saw her head out into the rain and quickly grabbed an umbrella and caught up to her. As he was doing his effort to show "radical hospitality", our guest said angrily, "I finally came and no one even said "hello" to me."

This is why it is critically important that our hospitality follow the biblical model of "excess". That guest finally responded to Jesus spirit as he was drawing her to him". Clearly, our guest thought that following that nudge was a mistake. Who knows if we or any other church ever got another chance...

### **How can you practice radical hospitality in your life?**

Now one question remains and I do not have the time to answer it today...I don't think I need to answer it for you. You can do it for yourself. So I want you to take the time to jot down your responses on your message notes sheet. The question is: How do you live out radical hospitality in your individual life?

How do you invite, welcome and include new people into your life? We receive excessive grace and forgiveness we don't deserve from Jesus. How do you demonstrate that same excessive acceptance to others...friends, annoying family members, business associates, customers? What does it mean to exceed their expectations, go the second mile? What do you need to do to open up your life and heart to others, knowing that you are really opening your heart and life up to Jesus?