

The Things That Make for Peace

Leaders Guide: Bible Study Session 4



Title: Extending Peace—“So that you may reach out your hand to comfort them”

Texts: Hebrews 13:1–3, Romans 12:13–21

Goal for the Session: Participants will study the biblical understanding of hospitality and its place in peacemaking. They will consider how we are to welcome and live with neighbors who are different.

Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured. (Hebrews 13:1–3)

Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” Not “if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Romans 12:13–21)

Preparing for the Session

What is important to know?

Hospitality plays an important role in the biblical concept of shalom. Hospitality means more than making family and guests welcome in our homes; it is about providing for the needs of any person we encounter, particularly the stranger. In biblical times, this was often widows, orphans, the poor, and sojourners from other lands—people who lacked status in a family or the community. Hospitality meant graciously welcoming such people in one’s land, home, or community and providing directly for their needs of food, water, shelter, clothing, and respect. Hospitality and justice are inseparable, for if any person lacks these necessities, justice is not fully present

in society, and peace cannot happen without justice.

Although the word hospitality is not found in the Hebrew Scriptures, God reminds the people that because they have been loved and cared for as strangers, they are to act in the same way toward the strangers who come among them: “You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt. You shall not abuse any widow or orphan. If you do abuse them, when they cry out to me, I will surely heed their cry” (Exodus 22:21–23; see also Deuteronomy 26:1–11, and Leviticus 19:9–10, 22–34).

In addition to commands to practice hospitality, the Hebrew Scriptures also include examples of hospitality. Abraham greeted three strangers and then shared water, rest, and food with them (Genesis 18:2–8). Abraham didn’t extend hospitality in order to gain the favor of the strangers, and yet they were the messengers who shared God’s plans for Sarah. Ruth, an ancestor of Jesus, provided hospitality to Naomi and received hospitality from Boaz (Ruth 2:1–17). These two acts of hospitality not only met basic human needs but formed new relationships across national, ethnic, and religious lines. Job, in confessing the sins of his past, included a petition for forgiveness for any times he had not practiced hospitality (Job 31:16–32).

In the New Testament, the Greek word for “hospitality” is *philoxenia*, which literally means “love of strangers.” Jesus both taught hospitality and modeled it in his actions of welcoming strangers, eating with tax collectors and sinners, meeting a foreign gentile woman at the well, and healing without regard to nationality or religion. Jesus appeared as a stranger when he joined two followers on their way to Emmaus (Luke 24:28–35). Only when they invited the resurrected Jesus to share the table and bread were their eyes opened to his presence. When we welcome others to our tables and homes, strangers who are guests can become divine hosts.

Many of Jesus’ parables addressed hospitality. In response to the question “Who is my neighbor?” Jesus told the parable of the Samaritan who was the only one who extended hospitality to a traveler in need (Luke 10:25–37). The story affirms the meaninglessness of human borders, boundaries, and qualifications of worthiness in choosing loving and just actions.

Jesus addressed the attitudes and actions of the religious in the parable of the two sons (Luke 15:11–32). The father shows hospitality to his sons, both of whom have become as strangers: one by running away and wasting his inheritance on riotous living, the other by becoming absorbed with anger and resentment.

Finally, Jesus contrasted God's values and the world's values in the parable of the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25:31–46). Our call to do what is loving and just is based neither on the worthiness of the recipient nor on the reward we might receive.

The writer of Hebrews connects the ethical teachings of Jesus on hospitality with the ancient story of Abraham and Sarah, saying, "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it" (Hebrews 13:2).

What does this mean for our lives?

God expects us both individually and as a faith community to treat people (even strangers and enemies) without partiality. Scripture teaches that hospitality is a moral obligation and an expression of our gratitude for God's love. Furthermore, we must be open to the ways that God may reveal divine purpose or calling through strangers or others we might not expect. Practicing hospitality is how we are to live as God's people.

The strangers in need in our time are not just widows, orphans, and sojourners. People looking for worth and work have lost homes and lost hope and been abandoned by friends and family. The stranger among us may be someone we have known all our lives but come to find whom we don't know at all. The stranger may also be someone we will never meet but whose life intersects with ours in hidden and mysterious ways. How are we to hear God's word to us if we turn aside from the very people who may be the messengers of that word?

Practicing hospitality doesn't have to mean that our homes or church buildings become lodging or dining establishments or health care clinics or social service agencies. We can practice hospitality in many places and settings and with other groups. But practicing hospitality cannot be done by simply supporting those other organizations without meeting, being engaged with, and relating to the stranger.

What are we called to do?

Hospitality begins with hearts, minds, and lives that are open to God's transforming presence. Just as in times of old, God may come among us in surprising ways through surprising people. When we place conditions on the worthiness or merit of those we will welcome, we limit our own openness to the Spirit's power and presence—our focus is more on rules and rituals than on

relationships and righteousness.

When we move from hostility toward hospitality, our actions bring healing and peace both to those we touch and to our own community. We are called to be open to the needs that present themselves to us and to seek out those needs that are not made apparent.

In many cases, the stranger may be close at hand but hidden from sight out of fear or shame. Undocumented workers and people escaping abusive situations are two such groups that may need the ministry of welcome but are not easily seen. The ministry of hospitality may require us to move out of the comfort zones of our church buildings and homes and into places where we will encounter and relate with the strangers of our time and culture.

Personal Preparation

Find a quiet place to prepare and reflect. Think about a time in your life when a stranger helped you in some way. Think also about a time when you helped a stranger. Then read Hebrews 13:1–3.

Consider how God has spoken to you through strangers.

You will need the following:

- Bibles for each participant
- Table place mats (11" x 17" paper)
- Markers
- Colored adhesive dots
- Newsprint
- Sticky-note pads
- A street map of your city or community

Leading the Session

Gathering

As participants arrive, give them each a blank piece of white 11" x 17" paper. Instruct them to make a place mat, using markers or crayons to write words or draw pictures of the following on the paper:

- their name
- a favorite food
- a living person they would like to eat with
- the farthest they have ever been away from home
- and a time they felt left out from a meal or group.

After most have arrived and had time to work on this project, invite participants to show and describe their place mats to the entire group.

Exploring the Word

1. Form four groups of two or more people. Give each group one of the following passages:
 - Genesis 18:2–8
 - Deuteronomy 26:1–11

- Ruth 2:1–17
- Job 31:16–32

Instruct the groups to read their assigned scripture and respond to these questions:

- How would you define hospitality from this verse?
- What are some of the examples of hospitality?
- Who is welcomed?

Allow each group time to complete this assignment, and then have them report a summary of the passage and their responses to the whole group.

2. Then, form four different groups of two or more people. Give each group one of the following passages:

- Luke 10:25–37
- Luke 10:38–42
- Luke 19:1–10
- Matthew 25: 31–46

Instruct the groups to read their assigned scripture and respond to these questions:

- How would you define hospitality from this verse?
- What are some of the examples of hospitality?
- Who is welcomed?

Allow each group time to complete this assignment and then have them report a summary of the passage and their responses to the whole group.

Reflecting on the Word

Option 1

Choose one or more of the following activities:

Mad Libs hospitality

This activity is designed to generate discussion about how the group or your congregation might respond to an opportunity to practice hospitality. Without telling the group what the purpose of these responses is, ask the group to provide a response for each of the following:

- Name a time of day or night _____
- Name a day of the week other than Sunday _____
- Name an ethnic or racial group not common in your community _____
- Name a number between 0 and 10 _____
- Name another country _____
- Name a necessity for living _____

Insert the responses into the corresponding blank lines and read this situation aloud to the group:

You are the deacon/elder on call for your congregation. You receive a call at A on B . You have some difficulty understanding the person, but you hear him/her say that they are a C family with D children who have just arrived from E . They have no family or friends, and they are out of

F .

Ask the group what they might say to the caller or do for the family.

Option 2

Who is like _____?

Jesus extended hospitality to many kinds of people. Using the list below to fill in the blank, ask the group to reflect on and respond to the following question:

“Who are people in your community or the world today who are like _____?”

- the Samaritan woman
- the Roman centurion
- Ruth
- tax collectors
- Pharisees
- the good Samaritan

Option 3

Who is the stranger?

Ask the group to respond to these questions or prompts:

- Name situations in the world and your community where people are facing pain, rejection, starvation, or war.
- How can support of agencies and organizations that minister directly with people actually become a barrier to hospitality?
- Are we loving the stranger if we never see them, hear them, converse with them, live and walk side by side with them?
- How does hospitality turn their pain into joy?

Responding to the Word

Option 1

Choose one or more of the following activities:

Hospitality chart

Prepare a chart on newsprint. List the following groups of people in the left column:

- Economically challenged
- Singles / single-parent families
- People of other faiths
- People of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds
- GLBT / same-gender couples
- People living with HIV/AIDS
- People living with addictions
- Undocumented aliens
- Developmentally challenged

Add several of your own.

To the right of the other column, make four columns with these headings in bold:

- Discomfort (Some or all of our congregation would be uncomfortable with these people)
- Welcome (We would welcome these people if they came)
- Inviting (We are actively seeking out and inviting these people)
- Focus (I would like to take the initiative to welcome these people)

Give each participant a sheet of colored dot stickers. Invite them to place stickers in the columns adjacent to each grouping according to their own attitude or the perception of that of the congregation.

Ask:

- To which groups are you most comfortable extending hospitality?
- To which groups are you least comfortable extending hospitality?
- To which groups do you want to initiate more acts of hospitality?
- Who are the strangers in our community?
- Who are people given the message overtly or subtly by the congregation that they are not welcome?
- What are three specific ways our congregation could show hospitality to strangers?
- How might we be removing ourselves from divine visitations by our policies and practices?

Option 2

Hospitality in your community

Spread out the map of your city on a table, or post it on the wall. Using colored markers, plot the location of your church and each participant's home. Draw a circle with a one-mile radius around your church's location.

Ask:

- How many of the participants' homes are within that circle?
- What percentage of your church membership would you guess lives within the circle?
- What would people who live within the circle say about your congregation?

- In what ways does your congregation practice hospitality (love of stranger) within your immediate community? Within your whole city? In the world?

Closing

For the closing prayer, use this section as a bidding prayer by inviting participants to name people or places in need of the ministry of hospitality after each phrase.

Leader: May God bless you with tears, to shed for those who suffer from pain,

(Invite participants to name people or situations aloud.)

Leader: May God bless you with tears, to shed for those who suffer from rejection,

(Invite participants to name people or situations aloud.)

Leader: May God bless you with tears, to shed for those who suffer from hunger,

(Invite participants to name people or situations aloud.)

Leader: May God bless you with tears, to shed for those who suffer from war,

(Invite participants to name people or situations aloud.)

May we reach out our hands to comfort them and to turn their pain into joy.

All:

May God bless you with discomfort, anger, tears, and foolishness,

So that you may live deep within your heart;

So that you may work for justice, freedom, and peace;

So that you may reach out your hand to comfort them;

So that you can do what others claim cannot be done.

Going Deeper

Consider inviting several people to be a part of this study who are not members or participants in your church. They might be people who live in the neighborhood of the church or who come from backgrounds not represented in your group. How will their presence change the discussion?

Preparing for Session 5:

Living peace "so that you can do what others claim can not be done"—Read ????? 6:??-??, Matthew 5:23-24, and 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

The Things That Make for Peace

Participant Resource: Bible Study Session 4



Title: Extending Peace—“So that you may reach out your hand to comfort them”

Texts: Hebrews 13:1–3, Romans 12:13–21

Goal for the Session: Participants will study the biblical understanding of hospitality and its place in peacemaking. They will consider how we are to welcome and live with neighbors who are different.

What is important to know?

Hospitality plays an important role in the biblical concept of shalom, the things that make for peace. Hospitality means more than making family and guests welcome in our homes; it is about providing for the needs of any person we encounter, particularly the stranger. In biblical times, this was often widows, orphans, the poor, and sojourners from other lands—people who lacked status in a family or the community. Hospitality meant graciously welcoming such people in one’s land, home, or community and providing directly for their needs of food, water, shelter, clothing, and respect. Hospitality and justice are inseparable, for if any person lacks these necessities, justice is not fully present in society, and peace cannot happen without justice.

Although the word hospitality is not found in the Hebrew Scriptures, God reminds the people that because they have been loved and cared for as strangers, they are to act in the same way toward the strangers who come among them: “You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt. You shall not abuse any widow or orphan. If you do abuse them, when they cry out to me, I will surely heed their cry” (Exodus 22:21–23; see also Deuteronomy 26:1–11 and Leviticus 19:9–10, 22–34).

In addition to commands to practice hospitality, the Hebrew Scriptures also include examples of hospitality. Abraham greeted three strangers and then shared water, rest, and food with them (Genesis 18:2–8). Abraham didn’t extend hospitality in order to gain the favor of the strangers, and yet they were the messengers who shared God’s plans for Sarah. Ruth, an ancestor of Jesus, provided hospitality to Naomi and received hospitality from Boaz (Ruth 2:1–17). These two acts of hospitality not only met basic human needs but formed new relationships across national, ethnic, and religious lines. Job, in confessing the

sins of his past, included a petition for forgiveness for any times he had not practiced hospitality (Job 31:16–32).

In the New Testament, the Greek word for “hospitality” is *philoxenia*, which literally means “love of strangers.” Jesus both taught hospitality and modeled it in his actions of welcoming strangers, eating with tax collectors and sinners, meeting a foreign gentile woman at the well, and healing without regard to nationality or religion. Jesus appeared as a stranger when he joined two followers on their way to Emmaus (Luke 24:28–35). Only when they invited the resurrected Jesus to share the table and bread were their eyes opened to his presence. When we welcome others to our tables and homes, strangers who are guests can become divine hosts.

Many of Jesus’ parables addressed hospitality. In response to the question “Who is my neighbor?” Jesus told the parable of the Samaritan who was the only one who extended hospitality to a traveler in need (Luke 10:25–37). The story affirms the meaninglessness of human borders, boundaries, and qualifications of worthiness in choosing loving and just actions.

Jesus addressed the attitudes and actions of the religious in the parable of the two sons (Luke 15:11–32). The father shows hospitality to his sons, both of whom have become as strangers: one by running away and wasting his inheritance on riotous living, the other by becoming absorbed with anger and resentment.

Finally, Jesus contrasted God’s values and the world’s values in the parable of the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25:31–46). Our call to do what is loving and just is based neither on the worthiness of the recipient nor on the reward we might receive.

The writer of Hebrews connects the ethical teachings of Jesus on hospitality with the ancient story of Abraham and Sarah, saying, “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it” (Hebrews 13:2).

What does this mean for our lives?

God expects us both individually and as a faith community to treat people (even strangers and enemies) without partiality. Scripture teaches that hospitality is a moral obligation and an expression of our gratitude for

God's love. Furthermore, we must be open to the ways that God may reveal divine purpose or calling through strangers or others we might not expect. Practicing hospitality is how we are to live as God's people.

The strangers in need in our time are not just widows, orphans, and sojourners. People looking for work and worth have lost homes and lost hope and been abandoned by friends and family. The stranger among us may be someone we have known all our lives but whom we come to find we don't know at all. The stranger may also be someone we will never meet but whose life intersects with ours in hidden and mysterious ways. How are we to hear God's word to us if we turn aside from the very people who may be the messengers of that word?

Practicing hospitality doesn't have to mean that our homes or church buildings become lodging or dining establishments or health care clinics or social service agencies. We can practice hospitality in many places and settings and with other groups. But practicing hospitality cannot be done by simply supporting those other organizations without meeting, being engaged with, and relating to the stranger.

What are we called to do?

Hospitality begins with hearts, minds, and lives that are open to God's transforming presence. Just as in times of old, God may come among us in surprising ways through surprising people. When we place conditions on the worthiness or merit of those we will welcome, we limit our own openness to the Spirit's power and presence. When our focus is more on rules and rituals than on relationships and righteousness, we may miss a message from God. When we move from hostility toward hospitality, our actions bring healing and peace both to those we touch and to our own community as well. We are called to be open to the needs that present themselves to us and to seek out those needs that are not made apparent.

In many cases, the stranger may be close at hand but hidden from sight out of fear or shame. Undocumented workers and people escaping abusive situations are just two such groups that may need the ministry of welcome but are not easily seen. The ministry of hospitality may require us to move out of the comfort zones of our church buildings and homes and into places where we will encounter and relate with the strangers of our time and culture.

Closing Prayer

May God bless you with discomfort, anger, tears, and foolishness.

So that you may live deep within your heart;

So that you may work for justice, freedom and peace;

So that you may reach out your hand to comfort them;

So that you can do what others claim cannot be done.

Personal Reflections

How would a stranger react to a visit to your congregation?

How may God be speaking a word to you in the presence of a stranger or visitor?