

In Open Heart and Home

by Rachel Weaver



“Company’s coming! Company’s coming!” This joyful call often echoes through our house. We all wait in anticipation and welcome our guests at the door. This call and the anticipation that goes with it has always been a part of my life. As a young child my parents had a never-ending stream of guests in their home. I loved looking forward to our guests and visiting with them. Singles, families and elderly, they were all interesting. Sometimes there was a special menu, sometimes folks just dropped by and ended up staying for whatever we were having at the moment. The food always reached and one theme ran throughout each event.

That theme was “Gracious Hospitality.” My father and mother always made folks feel welcome. Ideas were exchanged, doctrines discussed and friendship shared. Often we spent time singing with our guests or sent them off with a song as we stood by their car. I will never forget some of these special times. Only last week I met lady that we had known when I was seven or eight. “How is your mother?” she asked. “I would come to your home sometimes when we were newly married and your mother was such an inspiration to me. I loved to watch how she worked with all her little ones. You were so close in age and she worked with you so sweetly.” The sweetness of that testimony lasted more than forty years! What a ministry!

My parents passed that love of people on to me. There are few things more satisfying than to fill our home with people, fellowship, singing, laughter and food. We love to bring folks home to share whatever we have. Sometimes we

share a meal and sometimes we just fellowship. Sometimes we share our home for a few months or a few years with someone who needs it. We always want our home to be a place where folks come when they need a shoulder to cry on, a listening ear or just a friend. We always seek to share the love of Jesus, for His love was a sharing, serving, giving love.

The New Testament carries a strong message about sharing and hospitality and giving. Look with me at the following verses: Luke 4:18 “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the cap-

tives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised....”

This was the precise purpose that Jesus came to the earth for and He has passed that mission on to us. What better way can we follow His example than to begin in our homes, offering what we have to share? Paul experienced this sharing through Aquila and Priscilla while they disciplined him and we have all benefited from their love and generosity through Paul’s epistles. Acts 18:26: “...whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly.” He teaches this principle again and again throughout the rest of the New Testament.

An open heart is an essential ingredient for hospitality. An open heart will bring about an open door in an open home. Each of us has a home to share, however small or humble. I will never forget one family that we visited who lived in a very small house on a very low income. Things were neat and tidy but very, very simple. They served us soup and bread and applesauce with no apologies. They did it cheerfully and warmly and we were made to feel like honored guests. It is not the food or the house that makes hospitality. It is the heart. 2 Cor 9:7 “Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.”

I am convinced that if we learn to open our hearts and our homes in a sweet, simple way, we can reach far more people for the Master and lift many more burdens than the church at large is presently doing. If we must wait until the house is perfectly cleaned, or the budget can stretch to make an elaborate meal we will miss many, wonderful opportunities. The stay-at-home mother can be a missionary in her own home if she learns a few valuable lessons from the Master. Jesus met people wherever they were and served them there with out any fanfare. He gave what he had even if it was only fish and bread.

Another ingredient of hospitality is to give what you have when the need arises. Usually, for us that means having our children sleep on the floor so we can give their beds to our guests. Often we only have time for a little cleanup and things look just like they do every day for us. We serve them granola for breakfast and soup for lunch and we have lots of fun together. One time we had a family of fourteen for a week while the dad attended a week of meetings here. Beds were on the floor here and there with crowded conditions everywhere. The two bathrooms were kept quite busy and the food was plain. But we had lots of fun. We read together and sang together and did simple crafts while the dads went to church all day. We will never regret the wonderful days we spent together. That family has become like family to us.

Another aspect of this sharing is that your children learn to give, to share and to minister to others, if you do it willingly. It is so easy to give in to the temptation to grumble and complain about the extra work and the burden of needing to provide for others. Perhaps that is why Peter sagely advises us, “...Use hospitality one to another without grudging.” How many, many times I have failed this lesson. One day, a few years ago, the phone rang. It was a couple in distress, planning to come to our church to find help. We were maxed out at the moment with health problems and our married children were due to arrive with their families that

weekend to stay for a few days. I apologetically declined to serve them, but they did not get the message. They were on their way and they were coming. I sighed a big sigh and wondered what we would do with them and how we would meet their needs. I really did not want company then. They came and we loved them and they stayed for more than a few days! Finally they found a house here to move into and we have a wonderful friendship. What a blessing we would have missed if we had not entertained these dear people in their need.



“Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality.” Rom 12:13

“...they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints...” (What a blessed addiction!) I Cor 16:15

“A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality...” Titus 3:2

“...But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men....” Titus 1:8

“...Use hospitality one to another without grudging.” I Peter 4:9

Another weekend when it really was not convenient, we kept a family that wanted to visit the church and they proved to be angels unawares. Our baby was experiencing unusual health difficulties and these dear folks provided some answers which greatly improved his health. God does move in mysterious ways and so often He provides and unexpected blessing when we are faithful to His commands.

Finally, we must do it unto the Lord. When we serve this way we can reach across cultural, nationality and age barriers. We can play a significant role in preaching the gospel to the poor; healing the broken-hearted, delivering the captives, restoring sight to the blind, and setting at liberty the bruised. The world, and unfortunately, the church, is full of people who need to see the love of Jesus lived out in shoe leather. A Christian home in today's world is a miracle that must be shared. When we give in Jesus' name He sanctifies our simple gift of love and our kitchen table becomes an altar where fires are lighted that burn in other's souls. We can share the Bread of Life and the Living Water while we share our meal and fellowship. "We saw Jesus in your home," wrote one guest. "We did not know that families could live together like that. Our lives are changed forever." That is reward enough. I remember with fond memories, the guests from the rescue mission that stayed in our home one weekend during our revivals. That was a real cross-cultural experience for all of us. But it yielded wonderful fruit. The mother was born again during the meetings and her young son came to live in our home for the next few years. He was so thirsty for the truth and so hungry for the stability and love. Today he is 22 and living his life completely different from the sin and drunkenness and drugs of the inner city.

When we yield ourselves to God and open our hearts to His Spirit we discover with delight that He has given us wonderful tools to aid us in the "mission He has called us to. And wonder of it all, we are

all able to carry out this ministry in one way or another at some time in our life. We do not need a special college degree, unusual abilities or an immaculate home. We only need a sanctified open heart and an open home. When we open our homes like this we pass on to our children the wonderful heritage of hospitality and make it much, much easier for them to serve in the same way. How often I have heard folks exclaim, "We don't know how to do it! Where we came from, hospitality is not the norm." Sadly enough, this is true.

Most American Christians do not open their homes to each other anymore. After church, if they want to get together they often go out to eat. When

there is occasion to celebrate they go out to eat. When they go to another area, they stay in motels. No one would think of opening his home to a stranger. What has happened to the biblical injunction, "I was a stranger, and ye took me in." Matt. 25:35

Jesus knew that our homes would provide a way to minister freely to a person, body, soul and spirit. Our homes are uniquely us, and they should be a warm, comfortable place where hearts can open and be free. This nurturing atmosphere allows us to draw others closer to our Master and make a great impact spiritually. It is a wonderful tool in discipleship.

One author challenged me by saying that she takes a bit of time to go aside and prepare her heart for her guests. When she prays for them and for help to minister to their needs she finds that things go so much better. I have found this to be true, though I confess that I do not always remember to

apply that lesson. Our Father is not slack concerning His promises.

There are some practical things that you can do to make spontaneous hospitality easier. First, begin to have some order in your daily life. Make it a habit to keep the dishes washed or stacked neatly ready to wash. Sweep the floor after meals and quick-shine the



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bathroom when you use it. Teach your children to clean up the toys they are playing with. When they are big enough to get toys out, they are big enough to put them away. Unclutter and dejunk your house. An uncluttered house is much easier to clean and keep clean. Lower your standard a bit. You do not need to have a Better Homes and Gardens house and yard to minister through your home. In fact, that may actually hinder your ministry.

Learn to keep a few items on hand for simple meals that can be made quickly. Each family can develop their own favorites, but here are a few that we use:

- ◆ **Burritos and salad**
- ◆ **Chicken soup and hot muffins**
- ◆ **Chili and cheese over baked potatoes**
- ◆ **Hot ham and cheese sandwiches and soup**
- ◆ **Stir fried vegetables and rice**
- ◆ **Beans and rice**

There are many, many other possibilities. We do enjoy making really special food sometimes, but we mostly try to keep it simple and easy. That way it is not hard on our budget or our time. Paper place settings help a lot if your budget can handle the extra cost. If not, rinse the dishes quickly and stack them until later or make dish washing time a time of fellowship. Everyone washes dishes at their house, so do not hesitate to allow them to help you do yours. After all, it is one way they can help to repay you for the time you spent serving them.

Involve your children in the picking up and food preparation. Children love to set the table nicely. Train them in the days and weeks before to arrange things neatly and add a small bouquet of flowers from the flower garden or light a candle or use nice napkins by each plate. Learn to arrange the food attractively. Our children take a great delight in making a fruit tray a colorful, artistic arrangement. They experience a real sense of accomplishment when they turn a simple veggie tray into a work of art. Even the seven-year-old begs to be allowed to try his hand at it. And he can do a good job!

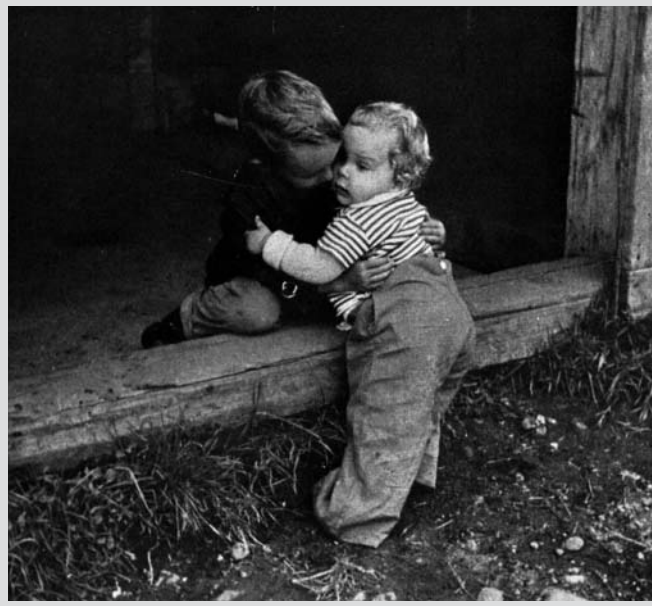
Use your everyday dishes if that is all you have and do not be apologetic. I do not have a Sunday set and that is just fine. I have plenty of Corelle plates from when we were married thirty years ago and sometimes I use paper plates. Add a smile and a joyful song, serve with love and your guests will be blessed. Put away anything that little ones could break or destroy so that both you and the guests will be relaxed and enjoy the visit.

Welcome your guests warmly and make them feel comfortable. Do not rush around after they are there if you can help it. Sit down and enjoy them. Learn to know who they are and share a bit about your journey in life if it is appropriate. Do not expect your visitors to necessarily have the same convictions and standards that you do. Remember that this is a ministry. You will have a far better experience if you plan ahead to keep the children well occupied and supervised. It takes only a few short minutes for things to happen that are very difficult to undo. If you have an

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older child take turns supervising the children. That way you both can have some time to minister and fellowship. Visit while you supervise the little ones. It is a good way to observe and learn to know your guests. Let the circumstances be vehicles for useful and up-building conversation.

Do not fret or feel tied down by your children. Use the little difficulties that come up as teaching tools and do not be ashamed to train your children sweetly while guests are present. Last week someone laughingly reminded me of her first visit at my house eleven years ago. My tiny one had grabbed a toy from her little girl. She says I called my little one to my knee and said, "Mama must smack your hand. It grabbed a toy...."

She had never seen a mother correct a child that way and she was taking lessons. I do not remember it but the story sounds very likely. Living is always the best way to disciple. I love to see Christianity put in shoe leather.

Finally, send your guests on their way with a blessing or a bit of prayer and a song. Go out with them to their car or at least as far as the porch and wave cheerily as

they pull out. This makes them feel special. Our family has wonderful memories of visiting another family years ago who was very warm and enthusiastic. They welcomed us so pleasantly and then when we left they waved and waved and blinked the porch lights as we drove out the lane. We have never forgotten that and sometimes we do it for our guests.

And last, but not least, your hospitality must begin at home. Our children and husbands deserve the same grace and the same love that we extend to others. We greet a guest with a warm welcome. Our children however, are often welcomed with, "take off your muddy boots, or pick up your toys immediately." They need to do these things but we need to

temper our commands with sweetness and love. Kindness and respect for our own families every day is a prerequisite for true hospitality. Like the statement "Charity begins at home," so does hospitality. May it be said of us, as we serve our brothers and sisters in Christ...." "...they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints." 1 Cor 16:15

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