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Redefining Hospitality for Women's Ministry

This download gives practical advice in what biblical hospitality is and how it should shape your ministry.



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Introduction

Hospitality in Women's Ministry

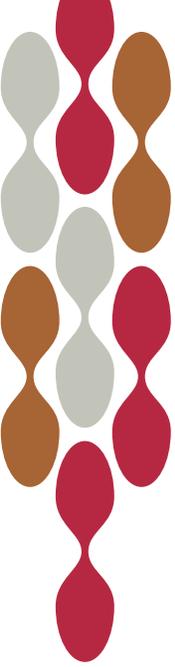
By JoHannah Reardon



Women's ministry is changing. No longer do women primarily want to center the church's resources on just their own needs. Instead, they would like to see the church help them reach out to others in a way that can make lasting impact. And perhaps the best way to do that is to model and implement biblical hospitality in the things that we plan.

This download begins by exploring the basis for hospitality, which is rooted in the gospel message, facing the fact that we won't be motivated to selflessly reach out to others unless we are convinced that we have something extremely valuable that they will want.

Then it challenges us to be at least as welcoming as Disneyland in the way we greet women to our events, activities, and outreaches. Our enthusiasm should rival that of the secular world.



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Hospitality in Women's Ministry

As we consider how to display biblical hospitality, it's good to remember that the desire for intimacy in our society is enormous and a women's ministry can be one of the best opportunities to provide that for our members as well as for those outside the church.

This download encourages you to consider how to make your women's ministry more of a family, available to each other in the nitty-gritty of life. It also suggests that food preparation can be a way to connect and equip women—and it's something women today want to pursue.

Finally, we discuss the difference between entertainment and hospitality in our women's ministries and ask you to evaluate which is dominant in your events and activities.

We pray that your ministry is transformed as you put biblical hospitality front and center.

Blessings,

JoHannah Reardon

Contributing Editor for GIFTEDFORLEADERSHIP.COM

Leader's Guide

How to use this download for a group study



This download can be used for individual or group study. If you intend to lead a group study, some simple suggestions follow.

- 1. Make enough copies for everyone in the group to have her own guide.**
- 2. Depending on the time you have dedicated to the study, you might consider distributing the guides before your group meets so everyone has a chance to read the material. Some articles are quite long and could take a while to get through.**
- 3. Alternately, you might consider reading the articles together as a group—out loud—and plan on meeting multiple times.**
- 4. Make sure your group agrees to complete confidentiality. This is essential to getting women to open up.**
- 5. When working through the Reflect questions, be willing to make yourself vulnerable. It's important for women to know that others share their experiences. Make honesty and openness a priority in your group.**
- 6. End the session in prayer.**

Where Can I Find the Motivation to Practice Hospitality?



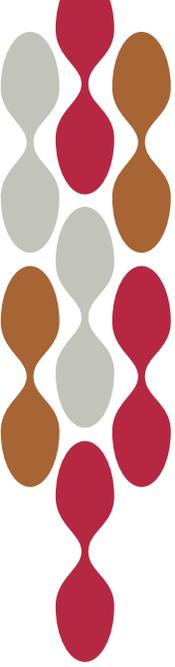
Focus afresh on the gospel message.

By Kelli B. Trujillo

As we consider our women's ministry, or any ministry for that matter, we need to remember what biblical hospitality is. Lydia of the New Testament was a successful businesswoman in Philippi—a dealer in the renowned purple-dyed cloth of the region. She was likely prominent, well-known, and respected in her city. Rather than participate in the dominant pagan worship of her culture, Lydia "worshiped God" (**Acts 16:14**) as a Gentile convert to Judaism.

When Paul and Silas sat with Lydia and her friends near the riverbank outside their city, God opened her heart to the gospel, and she believed. She and her entire household committed their lives to Christ and were baptized.

What's striking is that Lydia's immediate response to her



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new life in Christ was to urge Paul and Silas to be her guests. She suddenly viewed her home and possessions in a different light—as resources that could be used by God to help build his church. She saw a need as she looked at Paul and his travel-worn missionary team, and she instinctively sought to meet it.

Scripture doesn't tell us that Lydia prepared a fabulous meal for Paul and his team (though she might have), or that her home was perfectly decorated for guests (though it could have been). Rather, Lydia's hospitality was expressed in her sincere openness to God; she exemplified a readiness to use her home and possessions to minister to those in need.

Her example of gut-reaction hospitality poses some convicting questions for us. How ready and willing are we to share our possessions, our space, or our home? Are we openhearted and generous or—let's be honest—do we tend to be miserly and tight-fisted? Do we see our home as ours or, like Lydia, as the Lord's, meant to be used for his purposes?

It's possible that Lydia already was a generous and welcoming person; Scripture doesn't specify if this was a change in attitude for this financially successful woman. But it's hard not to view her immediate hospitality as a direct result of her encounter with the gospel. Lydia had just come face-to-face with the abundant and generous grace of Christ! She'd just personally experienced God's joy-filled, openhearted welcome. How could she not respond in kind?

Lydia's hospitality wasn't just a flash in the pan; it had staying power. Her generous sharing of her home and possessions extended beyond Paul and Silas to eventually encompass the entire new and growing Christian community in Philippi. Scholars believe that her house served as home base for the Philippian church for quite some time. Paul and Silas returned to



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Lydia's house after they were imprisoned (**Acts 16:40**) and possibly many more times (**Acts 20:1, 6; I Timothy 1:3**) to visit and encourage the Christians there.

Perhaps what's so compelling about Lydia's hospitality is its instantaneous quality, resulting directly from her new faith in Jesus. Hospitality was an immediate fruit in Lydia's life—and it should be similarly evident in ours. When we believe in Christ, something changes in us: our eyes see the needs of others, our hearts begin to care as God cares, and our homes become places of ministry.

And if, deep down, we know we're not like Lydia? If we've traded generosity for personal comfort, or a warm welcome for more "me-time," maybe we need our own riverbank encounter. Maybe, like Lydia did that day, we need to focus afresh on the gospel message that changes everything for us. Maybe we need to gaze anew at the extravagant love and grace of Christ who endured the Cross for us. In the light of such welcome, such kindness, such generosity, how could we not respond in kind?

This article is adapted from one that first appeared on
TODAYSCHRISTIANWOMAN.COM.



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Where Can I Find the Motivation to Practice Hospitality?

Reflect

- *As a women's ministry, how ready and willing are we to share our possessions, our spaces, or our homes? Is this something we are good at? If not, how can we improve?*
- *Do we see our homes and our church as ours or, like Lydia, as the Lord's, meant to be used for his purposes? What needs to change in our attitudes?*
- *Does the good news of what Christ did for me motivate me to share what we have without reserve? If not, what needs to change in my life?*

The Welcome

It's our job to create the friendly, open atmosphere of heaven...or at least Disney.

By Caryn Rivadeneira



Not long ago an acquaintance bemoaned the "Stay Off the Lawn" signs that ran around a church property near her house. She joked that she wanted to sneak back at night and cover the "Stay Off" signs with ones that instead offered an invitation to come play on the lawn.

I'd like to tell you that she actually *did* this—and signed Jesus' name to them—but I don't want to get anyone in trouble. So I'll just say the whole thing was hilarious, and maybe felonious, but it cut to the quick of a big problem we the church face: our nasty reputation for being *less* than welcoming.

This is not news. Lots of folks talk about how churches and the Christians who fill them up are known more for what we're **against** than what we're for and more about whom we'd like to keep out than who'd we want to invite in, or at least *keep* in.



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Plenty of churches combat this reputation with neighborhood outreach **programs** or **signs** and banners proclaiming that all are welcome. These ideas are good ones; it's important to declare a welcome posture to a doubting world.

But a trip to Disneyland reminded me that if we church folk want to welcome the world Jesus-style into God's house, programs and banners won't cut it.

Consider the Disney welcome: After receiving a fist-bumping, "high-fouring" welcome from Mickey Mouse-gloved cast members who lined Disneyland's Main Street, my six-year-old said, "It's like heaven."

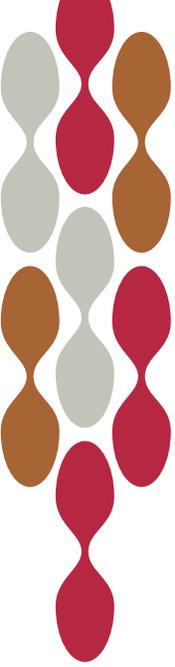
And he couldn't have been more right.

In fact, upon seeing the smiling employees waving and wishing us good morning, telling us to have great days, my eyes teared up a bit as my body tingled with the delight of this over-the-top greeting. Because indeed the Disney-style welcome we received that day *was* a picture of heaven—or at least the way I hope it'll be.

But more than the kind of welcome it *will* be, I realized the Disney-style welcome is the kind of greeting every welcome *should* be, at least for those of us interested in being the kind of Christians who bring about God's kingdom—one that sparkles of heaven—here on earth.

This conviction solidified a few days later, when I watched a **video** about Tim's Place, a restaurant in Albuquerque where they serve "breakfast, lunch and hugs" to everyone who walks through the doors.

While I'll admit that I've never once entered a restaurant and wanted a hug from the staff, the overwhelming sense of welcome Tim offered his diners touched someplace deep once again. Probably it's the shy, awkward, "I'm sure they don't really want



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me around," place in me. That place that longs to belong and to be wanted, accepted, welcomed. It's a place we all have. And it's the place Jesus went straight toward when he walked this earth—and the place he still reaches into. Certainly, it's the place we should be aiming for in others as we walk around as his hands and feet. It's a place where we as the church definitely have some work to do.

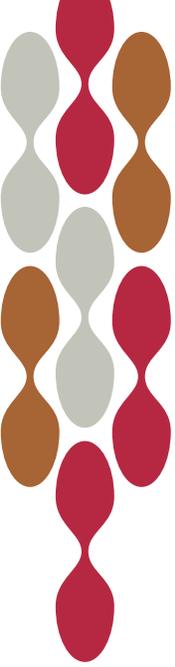
I don't want to add to the "all that's wrong with the church" fires that sweep across the interwebs, but if we are interested in keeping folks of all ages in church and living out the gospel, getting good at the simple art of welcoming people is a must.

Even for—especially for, probably—those of us who are no good at it. Case in point: moi. I'm not naturally friendly. I'm reserved. And shy. And introverted. I'm not gifted with hospitality—in either the Martha Stewart or the spiritual sense. I'd rather retreat than greet. Small talk does me in. I have no idea what to say to most people. Whether I know them or not.

The folks at Disney and at Tim's Place understand that the welcome guests receive is often make-or-break for a business. It sets the mood for the entire experience.

While the cynic in me roars that the employees are only so welcoming because they're being *paid* to or because we paid a pretty penny to walk down Main Street, the Christian in me whispers: *Jesus paid a pretty penny for us too*. And while we aren't being paid per act of kindness, Jesus did tell us to love the folks around us. It seems being over-the-top welcoming, extending hands and smiles and well-wishes to everyone who crosses our paths or walks through our doors or plays on our lawns is the initial, most elemental way of loving them. Of course, the love doesn't end there, but it's a start.

The way Jesus welcomed folks—the demoniac and the Pharisee, the strangers and the family, the lepers and the beaming with



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health, the women and the men, the children and the aged, the powerful and the poor—changed hearts and minds and courses of eternities. Not unlike Disney (gasp), the welcome was make-or-break for Jesus.

And how we welcome *is* make-or-break for us. Not for their business, but for their souls. Our women's ministry should be better than Disney or Tim's at welcoming. But this means people like me can no longer assume this role is reserved for the "gifted" greeters. For this ministry to become the heaven-on-earth, we're-thrilled-you're here kind of place it *should* be an all-in effort, whether we're gifted at hospitality or not. And welcoming takes all kinds of forms: from the first smiling, warm greeting at the doors to a willingness to scootch down in—or give up—our seats to alleviate awkward moments or newcomers and latecomers. From a firm handshake and a "what's your name" to a personalized escort to the event. From asking a name to *remembering* a name, or at least a face and admitting a terribleness with names. From noticing a broken heart in need of a hand or hug to dropping everything, throwing awkward to the wind and praying with a stranger.

Having a welcoming women's ministry means we treat everyone—no matter how they're dressed or who's hand they're holding—as the guests of honor that they are. After all, these are God's children and how we welcome them in can set the mood for their entire experience with their Father. I'm pretty sure a few high-fours in his name are the least we can do.

This article is adapted from one that first appeared on
HER.MENEUTICS.COM.

Reflect

- *How are we doing as a ministry in welcoming people to our events?*
- *The author mentions several secular places that provide a warm welcome. What are some others you can name that made you feel good when you walked in?*
- *What faith-based events have you been involved in that provided a warm welcome?*
- *How can we begin to greet others to our events in a more caring way?*

It's Inevitable: We're Human, We're Christian, and We're Lonely

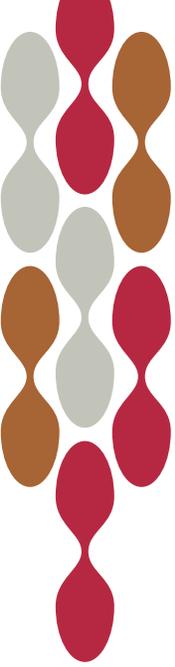


How an over-connected, over-independent culture keeps us from the intimacy we all crave.

By Enuma Okoro

In an article in **The New Republic**, Judith Shulevitz opened up an ugly can of worms, writing that "loneliness lay at the heart of nearly all mental illness and the lonely person was just about the most terrifying spectacle in the world."

She explored the fascinating history of loneliness and mental health and how it slowly became an area for scientific research. Going by Shulevitz's definition of loneliness—"the want of intimacy"—we're all suffering. Most of us aren't mentally ill or chronically depressed;



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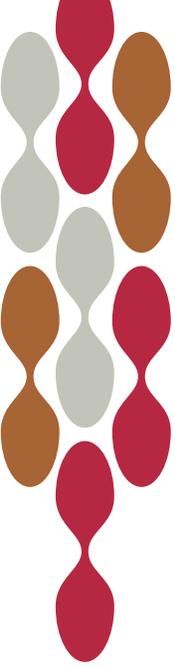
we're just human. We can't help but feel this pervasive sense of disconnectedness.

In the Christian tradition, we have a certain understanding that loneliness is inevitable and part of the human condition. We're created for complete union with God, but unable to fully consummate that union this side of God's Kingdom. There is an **Augustinian** element of truth from which we cannot escape no matter how much intimacy we do cultivate. Still, that doesn't seem like a sufficient response for our loneliness predicament. If anything, it's an invitation for Christians to communicate more openly about the challenges of the loneliness we are all bound to experience at various seasons of our lives.

In our age of social media, when new "friends" are a click away on Facebook and Twitter users actively form real-time communities around everything from favorite TV shows to breaking political news, we can easily be led to think that loneliness is an outdated phenomenon. But it is not.

An animation on Vimeo called "**The Innovation of Loneliness**" illustrated how these social networks can perpetuate our feelings of being alone. Our modern society largely measures individual success by personal achievements that have little to do with maintaining healthy social communities. "Many people lose their social and familial communities in favor of a self-actualization ideal," said Shimi Cohen, the video's creator. He plays off the research of **Sherry Turkel**, an MIT professor and author of *Alone Together*, who suggests that the false sense of intimacy created in the virtual world fails to satisfy people's real needs for knowing others and being known by others.

After all, being lonely is not necessarily about a-lone-ness, but about lack of intimate, meaningful connection. Intimacy



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comes from recognizing the value of vulnerability, that needing other people is not a sign of weakness but a mere fact of human existence. This necessary criteria for intimacy goes against our cultural conditioning to laud the self-made, self-sufficient person.

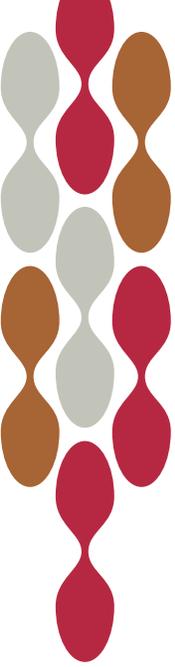
On the other hand, I think of the West African culture in which I was raised, where living and working together with others gets so interwoven into the daily fabric of life that one barely has the opportunity to sit in feelings of loneliness for very long. I've noticed that in many "developing" countries and in Southern Europe, cultural patterns provide ample opportunity for fostering intimate relationships over the mundane aspects of shared lives, with families across generations living together under one roof and random visitors showing up at your doorstep, only to be welcomed with a sense of hospitality.

As I continue to come across **articles that deal with our loneliness**—revealing not only the emotional effects of the condition, but physical ones, like illness and early death, as well—I wonder if we are talking about it in our communities, or just writing about it on the Internet?

As communities of faith we can and should reflect on what we might do to help one another respond well in those moments, hours, days, and seasons. As Christians, how do we prepare one another for the inevitability of loneliness, whether married, single, socially overactive or not?

The lonely can easily fall into the unfulfilling trap of the quick fix: the new romantic relationship or sexual encounter, the new material item, or novel experience that we hope will fill that space (turns out **shopping** is linked to loneliness). Loneliness can make our head lie to our heart and vice-versa.

As Christians, we're called to train one another in the theological virtue of *caritas*, as understood by Thomas Aquinas as



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friendship with God that ultimately leads to deepened friendship with one another. In that space, we learn to cultivate more genuine depths of safe intimacy with one another not merely for our own sakes but for the sake of the one who first called us friends and never sent his disciples out alone.

This article is adapted from one that first appeared on
HER.MENEUTICS.COM.

Reflect

- *Are the women involved in our women's ministry lonely even though they are around people? How can we find out?*
- *If they are basically lonely, what can we do to deepen intimacy in our ministry?*
- *How can we "train one another in the theological virtue of caritas, as understood by Thomas Aquinas as friendship with God that ultimately leads to deepened friendship with one another"?*

My Church, My Family

Why it's important to expand our "traditional" definition of family.

By Sharon Hodde Miller



Last spring my husband and I experienced a first: we contracted a virus at the exact same time. Until then, our illnesses had always been staggered, out of sync just enough that we could still take care of another.

But not this time. This time it hit us full force, on the same day, within the same hour. Even worse, it was a stomach virus, so there was only one thing to do: each of us fled to separate bathrooms where we lay pathetically wrapped around our own respective toilets. It was every man for himself.

I would have stayed by that toilet the rest of the night had we not been the parents of an 18-month-old son who, incidentally, was wandering around the house unattended. Both my husband and I were too incapacitated to watch him.



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We had no family close by, and we didn't want our friends to enter our plague-ridden home. So, I started to panic.

Help!

Eventually, desperation won the day. Between imposing on our friends and letting our son have free reign of the house, there was only one clear choice. I picked up the phone and called a friend from church.

That experience is among only a handful of times when I have been needy enough to ask my church for help. On another occasion, I had to go to the hospital while my husband was out of town, so I called a church member. Apocalyptic illnesses aside, I don't depend on my church for much—not like I depend on my family.

That's one of the reasons my husband and I recently moved back to North Carolina from Chicago. It was hard being so far from family. We needed help with our son, and our Chicago-area church could not support us the way our blood-related family members could. I felt isolated and burned out, so we picked up our things and moved back South.

That strain is a reality for many young mothers. Raising small children is hard work, made all the more difficult by a lack of support. Those of us who do not live near our parents—or whose parents live nearby but are unable to help—are stretched impossibly thin.

That's because, in my experience, family is more dependable than the church. My friends who live far from family are, on the whole, way more stressed out and exhausted than those with family close by. Of course there are exceptions, but most of us depend on our families to do things we would never dream of asking our church friends. That's reality.

The question is, is it biblical?

Family Redefined

Very often, American Christians treat the family as the most basic and most important unit of Christian life. Countless books and sermons are devoted to guarding the family, saving the family, and fighting for the family. The rise of divorce, out-of-wedlock births, and gay marriage are seen as "attacks" on the family that must be fended off.

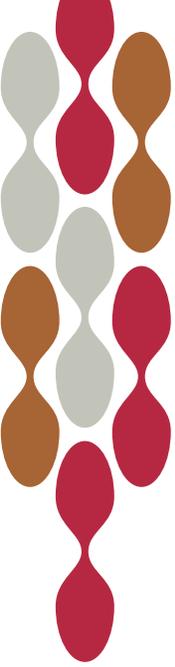
To some extent, this emphasis on the family is rooted in Scripture. Paul exhorts husbands to love their wives, wives to honor their husbands, and children to obey their parents (**Ephesians 5:21–6:4**). Likewise, Jesus opposed divorce (**Matthew 19:1–9**). Our priority on family wasn't plucked from thin air.

However, the question is not whether the family is good—the question is whether the family is primary. Is the family more essential to Christian life than the church?

To answer this question, consider Christian families of the early church. In his book **Families at the Crossroads**, Rodney Clapp traces the evolution of the family. He explains that the concept of the traditional family is not really "traditional" at all. It is a modern invention brought on by the Industrial Revolution.

Prior to the Industrial Revolution, both men and women worked in the home and the children helped. Marriages were often arranged, and family was about economic survival. Love and intimacy were not absent from early families, but they certainly were not central.

Furthermore, "family" was not understood as the nuclear unit of two parents and their kids. Clapp writes that in ancient Israel, the "average Hebrew household numbered closer to 50 or 100 people." That's because, according to Clapp, "The



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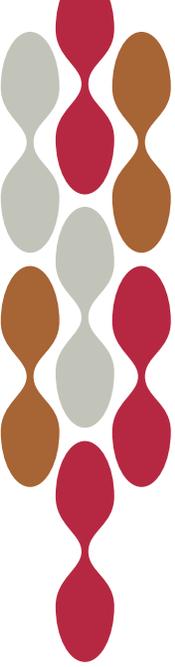
Israelites had no real conception of a nuclear family. What we call the nuclear family they saw seamlessly woven into the multigenerational extended family... So a Hebrew household or family would actually be a small village."

Fast-forward to the early church, where Christian families were similarly large and open, though for a different reason. In Matthew 12:50, Jesus redefined family when he stated, "Anyone who does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother." As a result of this new definition of family, the line between family and the church was porous. Unlike today, in which the family is a separate, private sphere, early Christian families made less of a distinction between the public and private parts of their lives.

Instead, Christian **homes were community bases** for the work of the local church. The Christian home was the location for church worship services and care for the poor. So when Titus 2:5 instructs women to be "busy at home" (NIV), that's not necessarily a reference to the family. It's a reference to serving the church.

In addition to historical precedent, consider Jesus' warnings about prioritizing the family above the gospel. In Luke 14:26 Jesus cautions, "If you want to be my disciple, you must hate everyone else by comparison—your father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even your own life. Otherwise, you cannot be my disciple." Jesus' words should certainly be understood within the larger context of Scripture, which clearly exhorts Christians to honor their parents and love their spouses. However, Jesus' basic message is this: when you follow him, you have a new family.

All of that to say, both historical precedent and biblical witness are clear. The most basic "family" of the Christian



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disciple is not one of biological relatives but **the church**.

Family Values

In a world as broken as ours, that message is not only counter-cultural but also full of hope. It gives hope to singles, orphans, widows, and young parents like me. In fact, it gives hope to any person who has experienced the brokenness or shortcomings of family in this world. And really, isn't that all of us?

That's the thing about "traditional" family: it's an illusion. It's also exclusive. It is a conception of family so narrow that it marginalizes countless vulnerable individuals—orphans, singles, widows—the very sort of folks Jesus called us to serve.

That's why it is important for Christians to hold up the church, not the family, as our top priority. That's not to say we should neglect our families, but we should reevaluate what "Christian family" actually means. Christians must do away with the notion of family as a pure and separate haven from an otherwise sinful world. The purpose of the family is not to preserve but to serve. The family is not an exclusive nuclear unit but an open hub of mission and hospitality.

This alternative vision of family is radical. To open our families in the way of the early church is hard. It means allowing people into the messiness of our lives. It means giving of our time when it's not always convenient. And it means having the humility to ask for help when we need it. But if we want to bear witness to true "Christian family," then we have to bear witness to Scripture's depiction of it. And that essential "Christian family" is, by definition, the church.

This article first appeared on TODAYSCHRISTIANWOMAN.COM.

Reflect

- *How can we become more of a family to those involved in our women's ministry?*
- *What kind of activities can we plan that will help people go beyond surface level to really get to know and understand one another?*
- *How can the Christian homes of those in our women's ministry become bases for the work of the local church?*

Bless These Hands That Instagram My Food



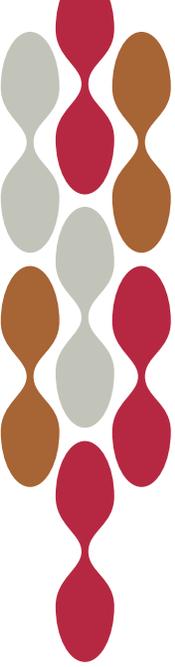
Michael Pollan and today's foodie culture make home cooking hip.

By Rachel Marie Stone

Lord, bless this food, and bless the hands that prepared it...

As far back as I can remember, whenever I heard this particular cliché in a mealtime prayer, I'd involuntarily picture a pair of magically disembodied hands, white and fluffy like Mickey and Minnie's gloves, hovering over the kitchen counter, chopping carrots, lifting pot covers, and sweeping minced onions into pans of sizzling oil. "Why are we blessing the *hands*?" I'd think. "Why not the rest of the person?" It seemed a strange way to bless someone, especially at church dinners, where we all knew the women whose hands had prepared the food, and who, quite often, did the serving and cleaning up as well. Even so, this blessing did evoke the hidden nature of so much domestic work. It still does.

Emily Matchar recently **took author Michael Pollan to task** for blaming women for the decline of home cooking. She



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notes that in his popular book **The Omnivore's Dilemma**, Pollan insists that appreciating cooking "was a bit of wisdom that some American feminists thoughtlessly trampled in their rush to get women out of the kitchen." His take resembles Barbara Kingsolver's, who in her **memoir of local eating** claims that the food industry essentially encouraged women to devalue home cooking as they sought equality in the workplace.

Pollan's newest book, **Cooked: A Natural History of Transformation**, consciously takes a few steps back from that harsh assessment of feminism's impact on home cooking, noting that while women's liberation is sometimes blamed for the decline in home cooking, the actual situation is more complicated. The decline, he writes, also involves the remarketing of prepared food after World War II. Foods like dehydrated potatoes and Spam—the goods that sustained U.S. troops and kept the wartime economy booming—were no longer just for the battlefield, but now could help women spend less time in the kitchen.

Throughout *Cooked*, Pollan distances himself from some of his earlier, un-PC commentary. He states right up front, in the introduction:

For a man to criticize [the decline of home cooking] will perhaps rankle some readers. To certain ears, whenever a man talks about the importance of cooking, it sounds like he wants to turn back the clock, and return women to the kitchen. But that's not at all what I have in mind.

What Pollan does have in mind is the idea that home cooking serves as an act of rebellion against the Evil Empire of the Food Industry; a protest against "the total rationalization of life." None of us really *has* to cook anymore. The "hands that prepared" our food are increasingly invisible and disembodied, as pre-*pared* or



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partially prepared foods have become so cheap and ubiquitous in our grocery stores, freezers, and pantries. Cooking has become a choice.

But perhaps it's because we don't really *have* to cook "the way our grandmothers did" (the notes of nostalgia and elegy continue to dominate this book as they did in Pollan's previous bestsellers) that cooking—in particular the intensive cooking found in the foodie DIY-culture—has grown so hip. In **Homeward Bound**, her study of the return to **extreme homemaking**, Emily Matchar claims that the influence of people like Pollan and his fellow foodies has "helped validate cooking as a valuable, not to mention fun, activity." Surely, Instagram hasn't hurt either: Culinary successes need not be the anonymous work of disembodied hands, gobbled unceremoniously by hungry spouses and children—we can post pictures online for our friends to like and validate too.

In my own **recent book on food**, I actively sought to avoid any gendered assumptions about which sex would be doing the cooking. It's true: I do most of the cooking in our household, but growing up, much of the cooking (not to mention the laundry) was done by my dad. Further, it's my conviction that God calls men and women to **employ their gifts and inclinations faithfully**—not that God calls women to do the cooking and men to do (if anything) the grilling. Pollan notes, "for most of history most of humanity's food has been cooked by women working out of public view and without public recognition." That doesn't mean we must either hold cooking in suspicion or elevate it in Pinterest-mediated praise.

Christians worship a God who invites us to ask for things as humble and ordinary as our daily bread; we are created beings who take the raw stuff of nature and *cook* it, breathing life into it, making things of which we can say, *very good*. Cooking



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can, indeed, be creative in just that sort of way. This cultural moment validates celebrity chefs, the makers of artisanal bread and wine and cheese, and those who are in the know enough to appreciate these things and post about them on social media.

But for me, at this time in particular, that hidden aspect to home cooking is something to treasure. At different times and in different places, some kinds of work receive greater honor and prestige, but, Scripture reminds us, the higher cannot stand without the lower. Christians form one body, and if, **Jesus' strange economy** is any indication, it's precisely those tasks that we don't value—those that we imagine are accomplished by disembodied hands instead of real people—that are most precious in his eyes.

This article first appeared on HER.MENEUTICS.COM.

Reflect

- *How can our women's ministry take advantage of the rising interest in home cooking without making women feel they are tied to the kitchen? Brainstorm some practical activities.*
- *What can we do to validate all the behind-the-scenes work that women do that, as the author says, is precious in Jesus' eyes?*
- *How might we provide opportunities to talk about the imbalance that women often feel in being drawn to domestic activity and the feeling that society says it's of no value?*

Choose Hospitality

The difference between entertainment and hospitality is more important than you think.

By Jen Wilkin



In anticipation of the holiday season, I decided to weigh in on hospitality and it became the most regrettable tweet of my mediocre social media career. The tweet was a flawless blend of selective memory and self-righteousness, designed to heap condemnation on the heads of my followers under the guise of offering wise counsel. It was a verbal "selfie" snapped from my best angle, positioned to make me look very, very good. Let's have a look at it, shall we?



Note the double-whammy: if your house isn't orderly on a daily basis, you will withhold hospitality from others *and*



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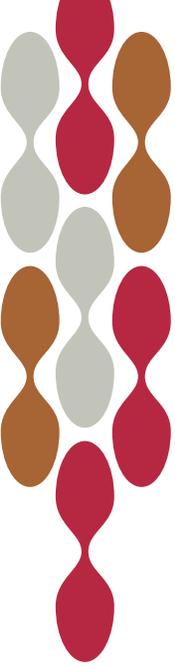
set a bad example for your children. Moms everywhere, be encouraged!

Three years later, I still cringe remembering that tweet, mainly because I have failed to live up to it repeatedly ever since. I presume my house was clean when I wrote the tweet, but it has rarely been so in recent months. Even as I type, I'm looking out across a disordered landscape of scattered laundry, schoolbooks, dusty baseboards, and chipped paint. That tweet neglected to mention what my house looked like when my children were small: how I would hide clutter in the dryer when guests came and how hard I found it just to get dinner on the table for my own family, much less for someone else's. So I regret that I proposed to moms a standard to which I could not hold myself.

But more importantly, I regret that tweet because I have come to recognize that the standard it proposed is flawed. It revealed my own lack of understanding about the nature and purpose of hospitality. In my self-righteous desire to offer advice, I confused "hospitality" with its evil twin: "entertaining." The two ideas could not be more different.

Entertaining versus hospitality: What's the difference?

Entertaining involves setting the perfect tablescape after an exhaustive search on Pinterest. It chooses a menu that will impress, then frets its way through each stage of preparation. It requires every throw pillow to be in place, every cobweb to be eradicated, and every child to be neat and orderly. It plans for extra time to don the perfect outfit before the first guest touches the doorbell on the seasonally decorated doorstep. And should any element of the plan fall short, entertaining perceives the entire evening to have been tainted. *Entertaining focuses attention on self.*



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Hospitality involves setting a table that makes everyone feel comfortable. It chooses a menu that allows face time with guests instead of being chained to the cook top. It picks up the house to make things pleasant, but doesn't feel the need to conceal evidences of everyday life. It sometimes sits down to dinner with flour in its hair. It allows the gathering to be shaped by the quality of the conversation rather than the cuisine. Hospitality shows interest in the thoughts, feelings, pursuits, and preferences of its guests. It is good at asking questions and listening intently to answers. *Hospitality focuses attention on others.*

Entertaining is always thinking about the next course, while hospitality burns the rolls because it was listening to a story.

Entertaining obsesses over what went wrong. Hospitality savors what was shared.

Entertaining, exhausted, says, "It was nothing, really!" Hospitality thinks it was nothing. Really.

Entertaining seeks to impress. Hospitality seeks to bless.

But the two practices can look so similar. Two people can set the same beautiful table and serve the same gourmet meal, one with a motive to impress, the other with a motive to bless. How can we know the difference? Only the second of the two would invite **the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind** to pull up a chair and sip from the stemware. Our motives are revealed not just in how we set our tables, but in who we invite to join us at the feast. Entertaining invites those whom it will enjoy. Hospitality takes all comers.

Why be hospitable?

Hospitality is about many things, but it is not about keeping a perpetually orderly home. So, forgive me, Twitterverse, for my

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deplorable tweet. I could not have been more wrong. And may I have a do-over?



Orderly house or not, hospitality throws wide the doors. It offers itself expecting nothing in return. It keeps no record of its service, counts no cost, craves no thanks. It is nothing less than the joyous, habitual offering of those who recall a **gracious table** set before them in the presence of their enemies, of those who look forward to a **glorious table yet to come**.

It is a means by which we imitate our infinitely hospitable God.

So, three years later, here is my advice to *myself* as the holiday season begins: Forgo the empty pleasure of entertaining. Serve instead the high-heaped feast of hospitality, even as it has been served to you.

This article is adapted from one that was originally published on Jen's blog, and is used with her permission.



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Reflect

- *Do we create events that are more on the side of entertaining or of showing hospitality?*
- *Are we concerned mostly in impressing everyone, or in revealing Jesus in our activities? How can we determine that?*
- *Do all of our women's ministry events center on only the women in our church, or do we ever reach out to the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind (**Luke 14:12-14**)? How might we do more of the latter?*

Additional Resources

Articles, books, and Bible studies to help you further



Articles

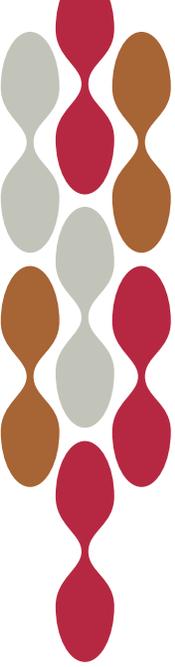
Food, Culture, and True Communion—But communion, or a sort of communion at least, depending on your tradition's theology, can happen at more places than just church. Available on GiftedForLeadership.com.

Rediscovering Church Hospitality—We are called to welcome. By Stephen Winzenburg, available on BuildingChurchLeaders.com.

The Church Deserves Better than Ugly Decorations—Neither Granny's castoffs nor HGTV trends belong in church buildings. By Michelle Van Loon, available on Her.meneutics.com.

Books

Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition, by Christine D. Pohl (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999). Although hospitality was central to Christian identity and practice in earlier centuries, our generation knows little about its life-giving character. Over the past three hundred



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Additional Resources

years, understandings of hospitality have shrunk to entertainment at home and to the hospitality industry's provision of service through hotels and restaurants. But for most of the history of the church, hospitality was central to the gospel and a crucial practical expression of care, relationship, and respect.

A Cup of Cold Water: Hospitality at Its Best, by Debbie E. Rottier, (YWAM Publishing, 2012). Debbie Rottier shows that what makes a person or a home hospitable can be as simple as offering a stranger or friend something to drink. Her rich experiences, practical and creative suggestions, and time-tested recipes invite readers around the world to first and foremost consider the love of Jesus Christ in ministering to others.

Online Resources

Hospitality: God's Call to Compassion—9 Session Bible Study. Available from ChristianBibleStudies.com.

Hospitality in the Church—Learn how to better serve both newcomers and regulars in your church. Available from BuildingChurchLeaders.com.

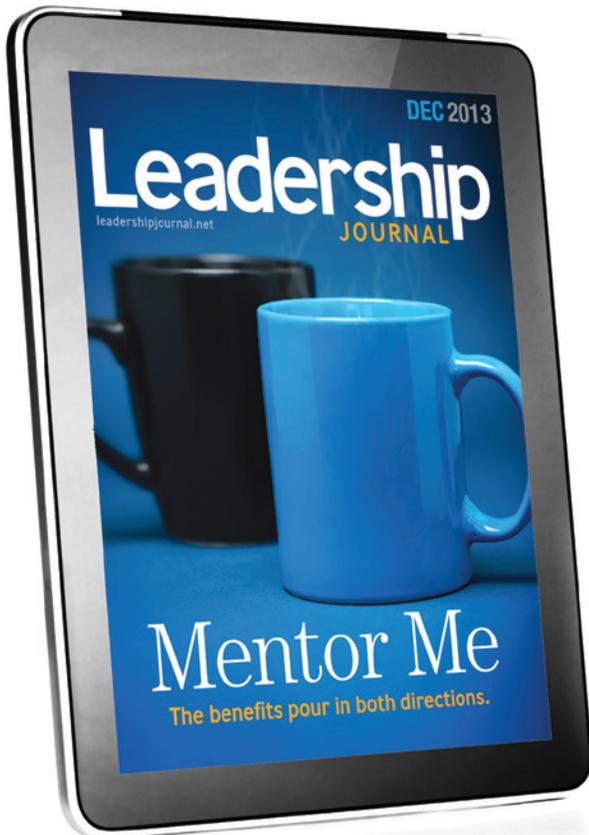
Assess the Effectiveness of Your Women's Ministry—Use these assessment forms to help you and your team discern whether you are truly helping women in your women's ministry. Available from BuildingChurchLeaders.com.

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