



# Practicing Hospitality

a study guide

By Alan Roxburgh

## **Practicing Hospitality - The Workbook**

First Edition, 2010

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# Dedication

The image on this page is a 13th century icon by Andrei Rublev called *The Old Testament Trinity*. It recalls the visit to Abraham of three strangers and how they are welcomed and gathered around the table in the practice of hospitality.

*"And the Lord appeared to him in the plains of Mamre: and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day; And he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him: and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground, And said, My Lord, if now I have found favour in your sight, pass not away, I pray you, from your servant: Let a little water, I pray you, be fetched, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree: And I will fetch a morsel of bread, and comfort you your hearts; after that you shall pass on: for therefore are you come to your servant. And they said, So do, as you have said. And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, Make ready quickly three measures of fine meal, knead it, and make cakes on the hearth. And Abraham ran to the herd, and fetched a calf tender and good, and gave it to a young man; and he quickly dressed it. And he took butter, and milk, and the calf that he had dressed, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree, and they ate" (Genesis, 18: 1-8).*



This is also how we understand the inter-relationality of the Trinity. For Christians, God is the one who welcomes us to the table, welcomes us as strangers to the food and community of the Trinity. Hospitality is at the core of Christian identity and practice. It is one of our primary witnesses to our life together in Christ.

This study guide is a small contribution to this central Christian habit. We are witnessing the early days of a movement of God's people that has begun to spring up in many places shaped by a growing recognition that welcoming the stranger and practicing hospitality are core practices of Christian life.

It is dedicated to those men and women who are heeding this call of the Spirit as they cross boundaries and move out from the sameness and homogeneity of our current church life to discover the amazing ways in which God is shaping a radically new future in our neighborhoods and communities. Our prayer is that the simple practices outlined in this guide might invite you on this journey which has been so central to Christian identity and yet has been largely lost in our current time.

# Introduction

## Practicing Hospitality

**Hospitality** - is a word, or idea, that seems pretty common and obvious to most of us. We just know what it means and what it's all about. There is even a *hospitality industry* that trains people in hospitality so that hundreds of thousands of professionals and experts are skilled in providing the best hospitality money can afford. The free, on-line, everyman, encyclopedia, *Wikipedia* seems to take its understanding of hospitality from this industry when it uses the following definition:

*Hospitality is the relationship between a guest and a host, or the act or practice of being hospitable. That is, the reception and entertainment of guests, visitors, or strangers, with liberality and goodwill. Hospitality frequently refers to the hospitality industry, which includes hotels, restaurants, casinos, catering, resorts, membership clubs, conventions, attractions, special events, and other services for travelers and tourists.*

However, in the Christian framing of the world hospitality is much more than what is expressed in this single definition. This study guide invites you to *practice* hospitality together with others over a period of several months. In so doing, you will discover something of its richness and how it lies at the center of Christian life.

This study guide is written with the conviction that one of the most important habits (the traditional Christian language for this is *practices*) we need to rediscover in our strange, bewildering, networked world is that of hospitality. *Practice* is a Christian word with a long tradition. To participate in a *practice* is to participate in a way of life, a set of habits; a practice is how we live inside a story or tradition; it's a way of life passed on from generation to generation. A tradition, like the Christian way of life, is lived in the present through the practice of common, communal actions and habits. For instance, each Sunday we gather with others in worship where we are shaped by the liturgy of, for example, the Prayer Book and weekly table celebration of the Eucharist - the common meal Jesus invited us to take each time we meet. Over the years, such practices form us in our habits, attitudes and values and make us into certain kinds of persons. Hospitality is one of these practices of Christian life.

*Practices* enable us to be shaped by a wisdom and understanding of being human we can get from nowhere else. I, for instance, practice saying the Lord's Prayer three times each day. This is not a meaningless repetition, but an intentional practice which, over the years, has shaped my attitudes and values toward God and others. This could not have happened without this praying. Some Christian traditions call this regular practice of daily reading Scripture and praying the *rhythm of life* because in such daily

practices we're formed in a rhythm that continually reminds us of God's great grace, care and presence in the midst of so many other counter narratives and demands upon our allegiance.

It is in this sense that hospitality is a practice, a way of being in life with others, rather than something we do to others once in a while as a good, middle-class obligation.

## **The Source**

What are the sources that shape our understanding and engagement of hospitality? For the Christian, the source is quite singular - it lies in the One who has and continues to receive us in grace and love. Hospitality comes from God.

This is why worship is important. Without participation in a worshipping community it is almost impossible to grasp the meaning of hospitality. This is also why this study guide is for local churches to be a part of their community life. In worship God invites us to meet with God through Jesus Christ. We are God's guests (hardly the right word - we have become God's blessed children, drawn so near we are able to say *Abba* in the wonder and joy of God's coming to and for us) and at the center of the liturgy is the table. It is to this table that we are invited, without bringing our own gifts or food or anything else like that, and we are fed with the food of our God and Creator. The liturgy helps us grasp that each of us, as we come together to the table, have been received by the God of Jesus Christ. The table is the place where we know, without doubt or exception, that what lies at the base of this universe is One who receives and feeds us with the food of life.

These are matters that go to the core of our lives as human beings. Liturgical Christian worship, passed down to us by the great traditions of the church, is a drama in which we participate. It continually reminds us and embeds in us the life of the God who welcomes the stranger, embraces the prodigal and feeds us with the food of life. Hospitality grows out of this weekly practice of worship and being in the presence of God with others. The practice of worship forms us in the knowledge and experience of our own experience of being welcomed, received, loved. The cost has been immense! In Jesus Christ we have come to know the depth, breadth, height and width of this love. As the Psalmist declares, there is nowhere we can go to escape this amazing grace that, in the language of Gerald Manley Hopkins, pursues us with a deep, embracing love. In this sense, in a worshipping community gathered around the table, we practice, weekly that all of life is a gift received from this God. It is God who was from the beginning, is, and always will be the hospitable One.

Hospitality is not a duty or marketing strategy but a way of life that responds to the God who received us. It is not a tactic to get people to do something for us or come to

our church. It is the expression of our life in God and in the community of God's people.

### **Who is this study guide for?**

This study guide is intended for small groups of men and women in local churches who want to explore together the Christian practice of hospitality in their neighborhoods.

### **How is it best used?**

It is intended to be used within the life of a local church or parish over a period of some twelve weeks. It is recommended that each member of the group have a copy of this guide and that the group follow the step-by-step process outlined for each weekly meeting.

### **What kind of outcomes can you expect?**

By following this guide and engaging in its directions, you will discover some key elements of Biblical hospitality, discover how to practice hospitality in your neighborhood and assist your local church to shape its life together around the practice of hospitality in the neighborhoods where its members live.

### **Brief outline of process**

This guide provides a very simple set of steps. You begin by learning to dwell in a text (see final section "Dwelling in the Word"), share with one another some ways of connecting with neighbors, set up several times when you will practice hospitality in your home, reflect on what you are learning and share with your church some of what you have come to understand and believe about hospitality.

### **How to be in touch for further resources**

We would love to hear from you, update you with new resources for this journey of missional reengagement in our neighborhoods. Please feel free to contact us in the following ways:

- by email: [roxburghmissionalnet@gmail.com](mailto:roxburghmissionalnet@gmail.com)
- at our website: [www.roxburghmissionalnet.com](http://www.roxburghmissionalnet.com)
- video resources: <http://vimeo.com/channels/rmn>.

# Preparing

This guide is designed to assist a local church begin the journey of asking the questions:

What is God up to in the neighborhoods and communities where you live?

How might you join with God?

This study guide provides a simple but really critical way of engaging these questions by inviting a small group to practice hospitality in their community. You want to have a number of people participating in a three-month, small group process of exploring hospitality.

A first step in initiating this across the church is to invite interested people to a meeting. Each church will have its own way of doing this. It might involve a series of announcements in a newsletter or other means of communication. What you want to do is create a space where people can get information about what the groups will be about and how they can participate.

## Initial Information Meeting

At the information meeting you will want to:

- Explain that you are inviting people to be a part of a small group for three months that will have a specific focus of practicing hospitality in their neighborhoods or communities.
- Outline what will be involved. The group will meet for approximately 12 weeks and will do the following:
  - An initial one evening training session on the meaning of hospitality in Scripture and what is involved in this practice.
  - ***Dwelling in the Word*** - Luke 10: 1-12 (find outline for this on page 18)
  - Once per month group members, in some combination of twos and threes, will invite a neighbor to their table (supper, lunch) to practice the Biblical idea of hospitality.
  - At the end of the period you are invited to share with the church what you have learned.



# Introductory Session

This introductory session is designed to assist a local church set the stage for the small groups by describing a little about the meaning of hospitality in Scripture and ensuring that people are familiar with this study guide.

It is assumed that the leader of a local church will have his/her own resources for providing a brief introduction to the meaning of Biblical hospitality. A detailed overview is not given in this guide. Some additional resources for this session as follows:

- RMN Website *www.roxburghmissionalnet.com*
- Simon Carey Holt Videos
- Recommended Reading
  - *Missional Small Groups* by Scott Boren
  - *Introducing the Missional Church* by Alan Roxburgh & Scott Boren

## Topics to Discuss & Use in Preparation

### 1. The Bible's idea of the *neighbor* and *stranger*.

In the Bible **welcoming the stranger** and **practicing hospitality** to the neighbor is at the core of faithful living as God's people. Hospitality is central to the life of Israel because they remember that they were strangers, aliens, immigrants, refugees taken up by God (Deuteronomy 10:19) fed and loved. Being in the community of God's people is to love the stranger as oneself (Leviticus 19:34).

### 2. Welcoming the stranger and loving the neighbor is central to a Biblical imagination of God's work in the world.

Note all the times Jesus is welcomed to someone's table and hospitality is practiced. Note the following texts:

- John 2: 1-11 The Wedding at Cana of Galilee
- Luke 19: 1-10 Zaccheus
- Luke 10:38-42 Martha and hospitality

As you reflect on these texts notice how often there is a role reversal where the host becomes the guest and guests become hosts. Hospitality is a reciprocal relationship, a two-way street in which the host is changed and transformed in the relationship. Hospitality in the Biblical texts is always about the reality and possibility of meeting the presence of God in the stranger. Remember the story of the two unnamed disciples after the crucifixion traveling back home and meeting

the stranger. It is as they sit at a meal with this stranger that they encounter the risen Lord.

### **3. The meaning of *eating* in Scripture**

We may not think about it in quite this way but meals are a central part of the Biblical narratives. Going back to the icon at the beginning of this guide we discover that food and table represent the presence of God and shaping of things to come when all creation (Revelation) will sit at table with Christ and feast in the new creation.

Practicing hospitality with the neighbor and stranger is practicing God's future; it is a central witness to the new creation the Spirit is calling into life through the church. We may have turned hospitality into church pot-lucks and dinners with safe people who are just like us; but, the Biblical imagination calls us to a radically different way of life.

### **4. Hospitality involves some simple actions**

- Welcoming to a meal
- Great food
- Listening conversations
- Sharing ordinary stories

### **5. What practicing hospitality is NOT about**

- Witnessing or evangelism
- Inviting to church

# Group Meeting: Week 1

## Introductory Questions

- Describe a time when you were welcomed as a stranger and given hospitality?
- Who gave the hospitality?
- How did they do it?
- What was the most significant part of the experience for you?



## Dwelling in the Word - Luke 10: 1-12

If the practice of *Dwelling in the Word* is new to you, refer to the end of this study guide for some simple directions on how to do this in a group.

As you read the text together, here are some simple questions to share and discuss with one another:

- What is this passage saying to us about hospitality?
- What is the location of the 'church' in this text?
- What is strange to you about this passage? Why?
- What new insights does it give you about how God works?

Pray together around your conversation and learning.

## Question for the Week



*Given your conversation this evening are there names of people you might invite and welcome to a meal as an act of Biblical hospitality?*

# Group Meeting: Week 2



## **Dwelling in the Word: Luke 10: 1-12**

Begin your meeting together by gathering around the text and *Dwelling in the Word* with Luke 10: 1-12.

### **Discussion Questions**

- Since you last met what reflections have you had about practicing hospitality to the other?
- What names came to you this week?
- Why these names?
- How does the process of listening connect with the practice of hospitality?
- In what ways are your dwelling in Scripture and your reflections on the Biblical practice of hospitality shaping your understanding?
- What might be involved in listening to the stories of another person?

### **Setting Dates for Practicing Hospitality**

- Plan to invite one of the people you have named to lunch/supper or some other meal within the next two weeks. How will you invite them?
- What will be involved in welcoming?
- What might some ways of creating good listening conversations? Are there ways that some in the group might do this together (no more than 2-3)?

### **Question for the Week**



*Between now and your next meeting together reflect on this question: Where are you attending to the stories of others (the neighbor) in your community this week?*

# Group Meeting: Week 3

The timing of this meeting depends on when you practice hospitality in your neighborhood.



## **Dwelling in the Word: Luke 10: 1-12**

- How is this text impacting your understanding of the meaning of *the stranger* and the practice of *hospitality*?
- What new questions does the passage raise for us?

## **Group Discussion**

- Are there stories of the neighborhood you were attending to this week?
- Share together a brief summaries of practicing hospitality.
- What was the most important part of this experience for you?
- What did you find the most challenging?
- If you could imagine yourself in the place of your guest, how might they experience or read the Luke 10 passage?
- Does this assist you in seeing the passage in a new way?



## **Question for the Week**

*Are there ways in which you are beginning to 'awaken' to your neighborhood and see it with fresh eyes?*

# Group Meeting: Week 4 - 5



## **Dwelling in the Word: Luke 10: 1-12**

- Where are you drawn to, or, where do you stop in the text this time?
- How is this passage speaking to you in fresh ways about hospitality?
- How is your understanding of the meaning of *the stranger* and the practice of *hospitality* being transformed?
- What new questions are we asking of the passage?

## **Group Discussion**

Meeting in pairs sharing responses to these questions:

- Where do you find yourself 'waking up'?
- Is there a story of where you are seeing your neighborhood with fresh eyes?
- What have you experienced?
- What are you learning?
- What might this experience be saying about being a missional people?

As a whole group:

- Share a a story you heard from your partner and say a little about how you heard him/her describe his/her learning. Summarize your common learning.
- What is emerging from these stories that might suggest how to be God's missional people in your community.



## **Question for the Week**

*As you begin to attend to the stories of people in your community, how might God be leading you to pray for them?*



# Group Meeting: Week 6



## **Dwelling in the Word – Luke 10: 1-12**

- Where did the other person stop in this passage?
- Why did he/she stop at that place?
- What question would your partner ask a Biblical scholar? Why?

## **Group Discussion: Practicing Hospitality in the Neighborhood**

- Where is God leading you to pray for people in your community?
- Who would you like to invite for a meal?
- Why do you want to invite them?
- How will you invite this person(s) to supper in the next two weeks?
- How might you have welcoming, listening conversations with them?
- Might some of you do this together?

## **Practicing Discernment**

In Simon Carey Holt's video, he talks about developing spiritual practices for the neighborhood. One of these is asking: "What might God be up to next door?" This is about learning to see with fresh eyes; it's about practicing what Christians have called discernment. We often feel that this kind of looking and discerning is only for specially trained or really 'spiritual' people. The truth is very different. All of us as Christians are invited to practice this discernment as a normal part of our everyday life. Most of us, however, have lost the skill, or gifting, to practice this discernment. It's what we call asking what God's Spirit is up to in our very own neighborhoods. Again, we tend to think God is at work inside our church or in our private lives but God's Spirit is up to all kinds of amazing things in our neighborhoods. The story is told of how a blind man came to Jesus asking to be given back his sight. Jesus touched the man's eyes with a spit and dust paste he had made from the earth. The man's sight returned but he could only see 'people who looked like trees'. Jesus touched him again and he could see what was happening about him. We, too, are often like that blind man in terms of our Christian life. Our 'sight' has been limited as if we've lived all our lives without realizing there was far more to be seen of the world than we could have imagined. One of our practices is to gain this 'second-sight' of learning to discern what the Spirit is up to in our neighborhoods. But, like someone receiving new sight, it takes practice to learn and we'll always make mistakes at the beginning (seeing people and thinking

they're trees). This week's question invites you to begin exercising this kind of discernment.



### **Question for the Week**

*Where might the Spirit be up to something on your street (or apartment)?*

# Group Meeting: Week 7

The timing of this meeting will depend on when you practice hospitality. You are encouraged to practice this second hospitality event quite soon and make sure you meet as a group within two or three weeks of the last meeting.



## **Dwelling in the Word: Luke 10: 1-12**

- Where did the 'other' in the group stop in this passage?
- Why?
- What new questions does he/she have of the passage

## **Group Discussion**

- Where might the Spirit be up to something in your community? Share together your experiences of hospitality.
- What was the most important part of this experience for you?
- What did you find the most challenging?
- If you could imagine yourself in the place of your guest, how might they experience or read the Luke 10 passage?
- How does this assist you in seeing the passage in a new way?



## **Question for the Week**

*We invite you to continue living with the question from the last meeting: Where might the Spirit be up to something on your street (or apartment)?*

# Group Meeting: Week 8 - 9



## **Dwelling in the Word: Luke 10: 1-12**

- Where did your partner (*the other*) stop in this passage?
- Why?
- What new questions does he/she of the passage?

## **Group Discussion**

Meeting in pairs, share a story with each other of the following:

- What you have experienced about your neighborhood over these past weeks.
- What you are learning?
- Where might the Spirit be up to something on your street (or apartment)?

As a whole group:

- Share one another's stories and learning with the whole group.
- Summarize some of your learning.
- Are there common ways the Spirit is speaking?



## **Question for the Week**

*The question of the coming weeks invite you to build upon the practice of discernment by imagining where God might be calling you to connect with what the Spirit is up to: What are the ways in which you might want to join with the Spirit in your neighborhood?*

# Group Meeting: Week 10 - 11



## **Dwelling in the Word: Luke 10: 1-12**

Share with one another the places where the text is transforming your understanding of *the stranger* and the practice of *hospitality*. Are there common themes emerging or places where you can pray for your neighborhood?

## **Group Conversation and Planning**

- Share with one another any responses to last week's question: What are the ways in which you might want to join with the Spirit in your neighborhood?
- What experiences over the last weeks have shaped your understanding of hospitality? What are you discovering about being God's mission-shaped people in this community?



## **Question for the Week**

*How would you share your experiences of this group with people in your local church?*

# Group Meeting: Week 12



## **Dwelling in the Word: Luke 10: 1-12**

- What are you drawn to in the text?
- Where does your imagination stop as you are listening?
- How is this passage speaking to us in fresh ways about hospitality?
- How is our understanding of the meaning of *the stranger* and the practice of *hospitality* being transformed?
- What new questions are we asking of the passage?

## **Group Planning**

As a group you have been given 10 - 12 minutes to share with the congregation what it is you've been doing and learning over the past three or four months. Respond to these questions:

- You have from the top of an elevator to the bottom to share with someone what this experience has been about and why you are excited about it. What would you say?
- What specific moments and stories would you share? Why these?
- If there is one thing you would want others in the congregation to do what is it?

Plan a way of sharing for 10 - 12 minutes your experience with the congregation.



# Dwelling in the Word

This practice of ***Dwelling in the Word*** is about learning to listen to the voice of God and one another's voices through Scripture. Each time you meet as teams, or as leadership, you are invited to dwell in Scripture. *This is different from Bible Study because it's an exercise in listening and attending, rather than building a knowledge base about the Bible.*

What follows is a description of how to create a ***Dwelling in the Word*** time. It is essential that in this first and in all subsequent meetings together, you begin with this time of dwelling.

Discerning together what God is up to in your neighborhoods is not so much about techniques or skills as it is learning to hear God together and so discern how you might join with the Spirit in your neighborhoods and communities. This is why listening is so important. In every step of the journey you invite each other to dwell in the Word. The following guidelines will help you get started.

Give yourself 30 minutes to complete the dwelling section. The text is Luke 10: 1-12. It is a text about mission, describing the sending of the seventy into the towns and villages where Jesus, himself, would go.

## Outline of ***Dwelling in the Word***

1. Explain the steps below to the group.
2. Ask someone to read the passage out loud to the group.
3. Ask everyone to wait in silence before the text for several minutes. As they do that invite them to reflect on one of these questions:
  - *As the text was read, where did you stop?*
  - *What insight or sense of God did you gain?*
  - *What question do you want to ask about the text?*
4. After a few minutes of silence, ask people to find someone else in the room that you do not know that well or, perhaps, have not met before and pair up with them.
5. Ask one to listen and one to speak about his/her responses to the questions outlined above. After two minutes, switch roles: one listens and the other speaks. Emphasize that the purpose is to listen attentively to what the other is saying. **This is their one, single task – listen to the other.** They may ask questions to help them understand what the other person is saying, but the focus of attention is on

listening attentively to the other. Tell people they shouldn't give their advice to the other or talk about something that is triggered in them by listening to the other person. They are to listen and ask questions for clarification only.

6. After four of five minutes invite people to come back together as a group. Ask people to do two things:
  1. introduce the person they were with
  2. share what they heard their partner saying

Again, remind people that their role is to **report what they heard the other sharing with them, not to report their own ideas or use the other person's sharing as a springboard to talk about what they think**. Note: This is a much harder task than one might first imagine. The attitude is one of focused attention on and reporting the words of the other. The temptation is to anticipate what the other will say and not listen or jump in and share one's own wonderfully insightful comments. More often than not, when people are invited to share what they heard the other person saying someone will stand up and talk about their own interpretation or views.

### ***Example of Reporting Back***

*My partner was Sherrie, she's from the North area of town just above the highway. Sherrie's been coming to ... for the past five years and is a single mom.*

*Sherrie stopped near the beginning of the text at Jesus' instructions to not take anything extra with them and not to stop or greet anyone on the road. She said it all sounded a bit scary going out like that without anything to take with you and it just seemed rude to not stop to say hello to people on the way.*

7. After numbers of people have shared like this, thank everyone for participating and underline again that we are learning how to listen to God in Scripture through one another. This is not about experts with answers but comes out of the conviction that the Spirit speaks to us through the ordinariness of each other's lives.
8. Finally, let people know that this kind of ***Dwelling in the Word*** process will be a part of what you do each time you meet.