

On Hospitality

Early on in our ministry years, Dave and I loved hospitality. In youth ministry, it felt easy. Fling open the doors, make some cookies, and say, "Come on over." The thrift store furniture or the dirty floors didn't matter, teens just wanted to be known and loved.

Then we had kids, my mom got sick, my sister moved in, ministry life got busier, the budget stretched thinner, and my exhaustion compounded. Suddenly the word "hospitality" began to fill me with a sort of dread, a feeling of overwhelm. I knew it was something Jesus valued and even asked of us, but as a wiped-out introvert, I could feel my capacity shrinking, and I could not figure out how any of it fit. I began to pay attention to what I said "yes" to and why, which was good. But I also wrestled with over-protectiveness of what margin we had available, and the conflict between how badly I wanted people to feel loved in life and how dried up I felt inside. It felt like a command Jesus had made that I could never truly meet, a demand that just took more of everything I already felt draining out of me.

But my heart ached over it because I knew hospitality's power; years ago, a friend's mom pushed a steaming bowl of soup across the counter, leaned over, and asked me how I truly was at a time when life was hard and few knew—and it changed my life. It was simple but I felt seen, felt **worth an offering of a simple moment with joy**, zero strife, or exasperation or even perfection. It was care and ease and it brought me in.

A few years into this internal wrestling, I was pulling into my driveway with groceries and saw Dave on the porch, watching our kids and neighbor kids as they bounced back and forth between yards, smiling and laughing and dirty. I thought to myself how perfect it was in all its chaos: children at ease, joyful in the pure pleasure of being free but also safe and watched over. And I felt a whisper that seemed like it flowed right from the heart of Jesus: *It's like Eden. Just make a little more Eden wherever you go.* And it clicked: **hospitality is simply making our world a little more as it should be**, an offering of heart and spirit—what else matters? And those

offerings will be different for every person and every season, for we were never meant to be all the things; in fact, trying to be so only perpetuates the lies of "not enough" that has invaded Eden to begin with. But to relax into who I am and just offer that? That I could do.

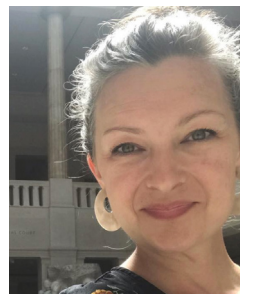
Over time, I've learned what those values are for me: I love for things to be beautiful, but I love for the value of comfort to be felt above perfection. I love for people to feel they can be themselves (which also means I need to be myself in front of them). I love noticing what people love and somehow bringing that into our interactions. I love good food and real conversations, I love seeing people take deep breaths or have a little reset, and I love setting the stage for all that and then stepping back and just letting it do its thing.

How all of those values play out changes daily, but I now know that if **I offer myself the hospitality of grace**, then others feel that too. Maybe it's as simple as looking someone in the eye, sharing laughter, being honest...maybe a little extravagance thrown in or maybe just "all I have left is this leftover chicken" but offered in love and grace. It doesn't even have to be in our home, it can truly be a way of *being*: generous in spirit,

caring, present, and fully there; a space offered even in the most undone of spaces, offering a little taste of Eden and being in that together.

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

- What vision of hospitality might God have for *you*? Whether it's a vision of Eden in your own life or something else, what aspect of that vision can you implement now and then cultivate over time?
- Take some time to consider how God has uniquely made you and set you in your life...what of those values and ways of being can you offer to those you come into contact with?
- What are some ways God might be speaking to you about being hospitable to yourself? How could offering grace to your soul and your current life overflow into extending that grace and life to others?



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