

IX. L.E.A.D. in Biblical Perspective  
*Lifestyle of Evangelism and Discipleship*  
“Building Bridges—#3: Hospitality Evangelism”

Hebrews 13:1, 2

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We are in a series of seven studies on seven bridges that we can build into the lives of people in order to bring them to the Bridge to Life. The first one was the conversational bridge. In this study I encouraged you to make use of questions and how important questions are in conversational bridge. As you do that you will need to show some self-restraint when from feeling like you need to right away start telling and selling them on the Gospel. As you learn to ask questions, learn to listen and ask follow-up questions continually. Think through those questions.

The second bridge we looked at was event evangelism where you take them to an event where the Gospel is shared. Events are great outreach opportunities where you share a common interest with someone as you invite them to an event. The event is being framed both to honor the common interest with integrity and to communicate the Gospel with clarity. You can use conversational and event evangelism together where as you are talking you invite them to an event you have a common interest with them on. Then you can use some conversational evangelism after the event as you take them out to coffee or a meal to talk about what they thought of the event.

Now we will add a third bridge in this study and really all seven of these bridges will kind of fit together and work together. This third bridge is a very practical one and it's hospitality evangelism. This works well with the other two. Let's take the upcoming Sportsman's Blast event. After having a conversation with someone that has an interest in this, invite them to this event and then invite them to your house for a meal to follow up with them and then continue with follow up in their life.

I will be addressing this bridge of hospitality evangelism but I also believe hospitality is a lot larger than this in the Bible. The Bible has 20 plus 'one another's' where we are to love one another, to prefer one another, to pray for one another, etc. I did a series on 16 of these here at Briarwood on Sunday evenings. One of these text says to be hospitable to one another and beyond that it is one of the qualifications for one to be an ordained officer in the church. It says they are to be 'given in hospitality.' They are noted for hospitality. There are many passages of Scripture in the Bible that deal with hospitality.

One passage is in Acts 2 where there are 3,000 men coming to Christ with their households and the church is continually devoting themselves to the Apostles' teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread and to the prayers. Then it says there were going house to house breaking bread with one another. Clearly, they were opening up their homes to each other in fellowship, Bible study, ministry and caring for one another. All of those things were working together in and for the Lord in their ministry to one another.

There are other situations in which we see this. Jesus, Himself, when He leaves to go to Jerusalem He is criticized because He welcomes, receives and eats with sinners. Why? It was because Jesus was constantly apart of events of hospitality. These were very evangelistically oriented because they were aimed and bringing people to sit down with Him who didn't know Him. They were considered traitors and thieves, otherwise known as tax gatherers. There were

also those who were considered as profligate and promiscuous sinners particularly in the area of sexual immorality yet Jesus attended those very events.

We're all aware of the hospitality of Mary, Martha and Lazarus. They were continually opening up their home for Jesus and the Disciples. One time they opened up their home there are so many there that many are crowding around outside wanting to see Lazarus who had been raised from the dead. When Matthew, the tax gatherer, gets converted he immediately throws a dinner party for everyone giving Jesus another avenue to share the Gospel in a hospitality moment.

One area that was constantly used for hospitality in the Bible was the Upper Room so whoever owned that was constantly making it available to Jesus and others for hospitality. In fact, whoever owned that Upper Room had already had it arranged with Jesus that the last Passover meal and the first Lord's Supper meal would take place there, in which it was instituted for us. It was in that Upper Room that many of them stayed who were fearful around the death of Jesus and before His resurrection. It is in that room that the Disciples met in hospitality with Jesus on the day of His resurrection. They met there on the second Lord's Day after Jesus' resurrection and it was there that the 120 went to go to prayer to call the Spirit of God before they would take the Gospel out into the streets of Jerusalem. It was there that Mathias was chosen in place of Judas Iscariot.

That Upper Room in hospitality became a noteworthy room. I believe the father of John Mark owned that Upper Room and I believe he was related to Barnabas. At another time I will take you through the various passages in the Bible as to why I believe that but I wouldn't declare it, although it is what I believe. I don't know his name but out of his hospitality and he had no idea of what it would mean, arguably that room in Jerusalem opened up where hospitality becomes the epicenter of Christianity. It is there that the tsunami wave of the Gospel will radiate throughout the entire world.

Then there was Jesus, Himself, giving hospitality. When Abraham returns from feeding the kings and he meets in the valley of the Kings with the priest King of Salem that Melchizedek then brings food as he opens himself up to receive Abraham. It is my conviction that is a pre-Incarnate appearance of Christ – Melchizedek. So here are just some various instances where we see hospitality at work and then we see hospitality in the text for this study.

Hebrews 13:1–2 says *[1] Let brotherly love continue. [2] Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.*

How do we let brotherly love continue? It is the love for the brethren and then He gives us one way through hospitality. Then we see that some who have shown hospitality to strangers, little did they know they were entertaining angels and beyond that one of those angels was the angel of the Lord, pre-Incarnate appearance of Christ. He is referring to that text in Genesis when these three travelers show up at the tent of Abraham's door and Abraham extends hospitality to these strangers. He fixes a meal for them that includes the baking of bread and he washes their feet. We soon find out it is two angels and Christ Himself – the angel of the Lord. Abraham has washed the feet of the One who will wash the feet of those in the Upper Room at that moment of hospitality. Now it becomes known to us in the Scriptures that these were angels that Abraham entertained.

I, II and III John exhort us to consistency in our Christian life that embedded there is the call for us to open up hospitality to those who have been sent by the Lord to proclaim the Gospel beyond their own cultures to other cultures. Today we call these people missionaries but then they would have called them small 'A' apostles, sent ones. He tells us that when you have

brought them into your home and sustained them and sent them on their way in a manner worthy of the Gospel, then you actually become partners with them in their ministry.

I'm not sure if this is done anymore but one of the old practices as which I have been a beneficiary of is when I would go speak at a conference I was asked if I wanted to stay at a hotel or in a home and I would generally tell them to put me where they thought was best with just a little bit of privacy for me to spend time in the Word and prayer. I am now moving into my fourth decade of ministry and I can't tell you the number of times I was put up with a family who had set aside a room, or built a room or decorated a room where over it hung a sign that said 'the prophet's room.' It was the place they specifically set aside and prayed over to house missionaries, preachers and sent ones. That hospitality had been embedded in their life.

With what we have just looked at I want to now get you to start thinking about hospitality and what all this could incorporate. Most of us think of hospitality of having someone in your home and having a big meal for them. A meal can be a part of it as we have seen in a number of these instances but the big deal of hospitality is the open door to the open home because of the open heart. In other words, let me do this somewhat negatively. Why does the Bible have to say 'don't neglect showing hospitality'? It was because some Christians were neglecting it and weren't even thinking about doing it.

I want to give you nine reasons why people neglect to show hospitality but I want to give one foundational one. A foundational one is a closed heart for when you close your heart you close your home and you close the door. The most important issue for hospitality is an open heart to open the home whereby you open a door which is hospitality. There is this church with the name 'Church of the Open Door' and the Lord says He knocks at the door of churches and by the way it is speaking of the church there and not the individual. Is it an open door? I went around that church a number of times and I couldn't find an open door anywhere and so finally I just beat on the door because I wanted to get in. There was so very famous things that had happened there. I wanted to get insight to get on sight. This man finally came to the door and I asked if I could come in for about 15 minutes to look around and this custodian of this church basically said 'Are you kiddin me' and he shut the door in my face. I said 'So much for the Church of the Open Door.'

These days with all the security issues going around that even makes it more challenging to have an open door but churches are to have an open door and our homes should have an open door yet people make a judgment call whether we like it or not about our hearts concerning our open home through an open door. I'm not telling you that you have to take the locks off your door and it has to be open all the time. That is not what we're talking about here but I meet people and you know that they are marked by hospitality because you can sense it. Here is an example.

There was an ordained pastor named Okie who realized after he had graduated from seminary that he was not to be a pastor because he felt he couldn't preach or lead but he loved Jesus. So he finished seminary but didn't go into the ministry and I met him in my first congregation in Miami. He told me that he was a great small group leader so I told him I would get a small group going and then hand it off to him since I wasn't a great small group leader. We grew it up to 18 people and I handed it off to him. Two months later I got a phone call and it was down to three. I said 'Okie what happened?' He said 'I don't know, they just started leaving.' So we decided to start over and did another one. We got this one up to about 16 people and I handed it off to Okie to lead and then a little while later Okie said they were down to 6. He said 'I'm doubling myself but I'm still losing them.'

We decided to try it again and I was running out of places to have them so I said to Okie ‘Can we start this one in your home?’ And he said ‘Yeah, let’s do it at my house.’ That had to be one of the best small groups I have ever been a part of in my life. Okie loved small groups so he assumed he was a small group leader but he was actually not a small group leader. Yet he and his wife were the best hosts of a small group that I had ever seen in my life. When you came into their home you felt right at home. It was an open door, open home and open heart. You never felt like you were putting them out and you felt like they wanted you there. I do want to say that I have experienced that here at Briarwood from so many of you and I thank the Lord for it. That is what hospitality is.

I want to twist it a little bit though. An open heart will have an open home expressed through an open door and that’s hospitality. Many things will take place when you do that. Hospitality is to be directed to two groups – saints and strangers. Hospitality to the saints is for encouraging, equipping and fellowship. Hospitality to strangers are for encouragement and evangelism. Perhaps you will host a small group Bible study for the saints or have a fellowship time periodically. Maybe it is being a part of a supper club dynamic that is going on or you make your home available to missionaries coming in for a conference or you provide a meal or transportation to one in need. These are some ways to encourage the saints.

Then I want to open up my home to strangers for evangelism and here is where the twist comes. When you open the door and people come into your home with your open heart, you will be amazed at how it opens their heart and the things that they will share and talk about. I love the time we greet one another in church yet one might think ‘how shallow is that’ but you don’t get into deep water without getting into shallow water first. So as you greet one another you are likely to start opening up your home to one another after that. So this can be a starting point in making people feel welcome which is not only a part of our church being hospitable but as you greet a stranger you can take it to another level. But when you get someone to your home you will be amazed at how far the heart conversations will go even with a stranger or an unbeliever. So now I’d like to give you some of the reasons people would neglect hospitality, whether to saints or strangers but in particular thinking about evangelism.

The first reason hospitality is neglected is because of the culture. Many times the culture shapes us more than the Word of God and now we are in a culture where the home is now a statement of significance and the castle to retreat into. Sociologists even call our culture a cocooning culture, where we are out in the world with all of the challenges that are there and now people see their home only as a cocoon to crawl back into and then will crawl back out of it the next day to take this thing on again. So people think ‘my home is not a hospital for people to come in and get better for my home is my castle that makes me feel better.’ So many neglect hospitality because the culture shapes our view and use of our home, more than any other.

I think this is a big deal and the rest of the reasons I’ll go through fairly quickly but one time this person called me up and told me this pastor she had heard had just railed against people with large homes. She was sensitive to God’s Word and had went home crushed after hearing this because she knew that she and her husband had one of the larger homes in the entire church. I told her ‘I’m sure the pastor had appropriate motivations but if you want to get to the bottom of this then go back to the pastor and say ‘I was really convicted that you were saying big homes are sinful so my husband and I are going to sell our home but before we sell it and look for another can you give me the square footage that is holy, where Jesus will be pleased with what we buy.’ Do you see how ridiculous that sounds?

The question is not the size of the home directly, but the question is, does their home have them or does Jesus have their home through them?' and that will show up with what they do with it. I happen to know that because that church had three of its major events every year in their home and they always kept visiting pastors, missionaries and choirs for that church. They loved to do hospitality. In fact, that was their view that God gave them that house to open it up to others. That is why you need to stay away from these legalistic approaches. It's like the person who thinks they have to have so much money and it's not how much money you have but does it have you and what do you do with it? How did you get it? For a home, does the culture define the use of your home, did you buy it for your statement/castle, or did you buy it 'only' for your cocoon? I say this because I cocoon, but God willing not to the exclusion.

Here is another example. When I came to this church we had a passing of the mantle service from Frank to me. Two things happened in that service. One was Frank giving me the Bible because everything is built on the Bible here for Christ. The second thing was that I asked the congregation that night which was a very full one, how many had been in the home of Frank and Barbara Barker and 19 years ago the vast majority of the hands went up. That is what you do with your home. You use it not only for your family but for the family of God and for the stranger. Don't let the culture define it for that's the biggest challenge for whatever it is that defines how you see your home will ultimately determine how you use it.

The second reason it is a challenge to show hospitality is because we're too busy. We don't have time for it. We don't have any margins in our life to have someone in our home. Just the thought of having someone in your home can send your mind into all kinds of places like, 'do you know what I'm doing this week!' I want to commend my friend Kevin DeYoung's book Crazy Busy. Read it and then don't be crazy busy. Get some margins in your life. Most are living under this culture syndrome that they are scared they are going to miss out on something so they join everything. We will go absolutely crazy doing this. You aren't going to miss the one thing that will make your life meaningful because if you know Christ as your Savior then you already have the one thing that will make your life meaningful. I want one of the pieces of my life to be hospitality so I'm not going to be crazy busy.

The third reason it is a challenge to show hospitality is that we feel inadequate. We think our home is too small and if you think that then you don't have groups but it doesn't mean you can't have people in your home. You may not be able to have 30 but you could have 10, 7 or 6. People think they can't provide big enough meals so I would suggest not to provide a meal but maybe some popcorn or tea and cookies or ice cream. It's not about the extravagance of the home but it's opening your home where people sense hospitality. Certainly it would be a neat home for we want to show that God is a God of order but your home doesn't have to be a display for Southern Living.

One might think they don't have the ability or can't be a good host but if you don't feel capable of being the great host of hospitality then invite somebody that can. We have men in our church who actually think they are good comedians. So invite them and tell them to take it and run with it. Then when you whisper they will be quiet so that you can share the Gospel with those in your home. Don't let all these things I've just mentioned stop you from having people in your home because people just like being with you in your home.

Sometimes our pride gets in the way of having people in our home and any vestige of pride needs to be crucified. Sometimes we have instabilities in our home and that's why we have elders and pastors in our church. When you have issues you are dealing with, we understand, but

call on us to help with those issues so that maybe through mentoring, discipling and shepherding we can see the Gospel stabilize so that you can open your home.

When you feel you can't have people in your home because it's not like other people's home then that is pride as well and that's called comparison. Your home is the one that God has given you and it's not a home that shouldn't be used because you compare it to others. People will enjoy your home when you open your home because of your open heart for they will sense it and being in that home with you will be enough. Then you can tell them about the One who makes your home, Jesus Christ.

Some of us don't show hospitality because we grew up in homes that didn't have examples of it. I grew up in a home where my mom and dad were hospitable all the time so we were just used to having people in our home. It seemed that every Sunday night someone was coming into our home. We also had extended family there so I had those blessings of examples growing up and maybe you didn't but if you would let me know I will give you many examples from this church that you can learn from and they will be glad to mentor you on how to do hospitality. There are plenty of people to learn from.

Some people won't show hospitality because they have made their home an idol where we try to preserve and shine it. We need to say 'no' to the idolatry of our home.

Finally, some of us neglect hospitality because we haven't learned something very basic from Jesus and that is, it is more blessed to give than to receive. We actually think it's more blessed to be invited into a home than it is to open up our home and invite others into it.

So here is what you can do. You can start by calling the church and asking for a list of visitors to the church and invite them to your home or you could just invite periodically those who sit around you in church to come eat with you that Sunday for lunch. This church was built in 1988 so it is 30 years old. I was talking with a man the other day who said 'Yeah your church is 30 years old but in dog years you're about 80 and the reason is that you are using this church all the time.' I thank the Lord for that. Now we can't accommodate everything for we have to think through things but it's opened up to be used seven days a week and we praise the Lord for being able to do that. So you can make use of the church facilities in fellowship.

There are all kinds of things you can do in your home and you can make meals simple by doing stuffed baked potatoes or hot dogs or taco salad. You can play games in your home. When I was in seminary, we seminarians would invite people who didn't know the Lord over to the house and we'd play a game called 'Murder.' You would sit in a circle and one person was designated as the killer and if he caught your eye and winked you were dead. After that game was over that was such an open door to evangelism because we would ask 'if you were to die tonight do you know where you would spend eternity?' That game was a great evangelistic tool. People enjoy doing games and there are all kinds of games.

You can use your home after an evangelistic event, for encouraging and the fellowship of believers and if you have devotions after your evening meal and you have someone over then they become a part of your devotions. Or if someone stays in your home on a Sunday you can invite them to church and if they choose not to go then you can meet up with them afterwards. If someone is in my home then I include them in and if you have children you will be amazed at the open door opportunities you will have to share the Gospel.

Your first child has to endure all of your idealism so when my first child was about 4 or 5 she knew the Greek alphabet and when people would come to our home, not that I was proud but I would say 'My daughter knows the Greek alphabet, would you like to hear her say it?' We would also have them recite Bible verses to those who came into our home and thankfully I

learned my lesson before my other two came along. One night I learned my lesson really well for we had just memorized the Apostle's Creed along with Hebrews 12:1–2 so we had some people over for a meal who were a part of our devotional time and I asked my daughter 'Jennifer, would you like to recite our memory verse?' She said 'Oh yes Dad' and I was going to use this as a bridge to talk with the people about the Lord.

Jennifer proceeded to recite Hebrews 12:1–2 'Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us...' I said 'go ahead Jennifer' and she continued 'fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God' from thence He will come to judge the quick and the dead for I believe in the Holy Ghost, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins and the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.' Amen. So we went from Hebrews 12 right into the Apostle's Creed and got them all in at one time so I was a little chagrined, she wasn't though, but boy that opened up the whole Gospel with the Apostle's Creed afterwards as well.

Just bring people into your devotions. It's your table so invite them. Let them know this is what you do as a family and that you are glad to have them be a part of it. Then when you are done ask them if they have any questions about what has just taken place. Let them know you would love to talk about it. That is hospitality evangelism. Do not neglect it. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the time we could spend together. Thank You for the Lord Jesus our Redeemer. Thank You for our Savior who has opened up eternity, the open heart of our Savior and the open door to come to You through Him. Father, may the world see that open heart, open door, open home and when they come in, whether they are saints or strangers, may their hearts be warmed and opened to the Gospel for I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.