

“Putting Love into Action with Hospitality” [**III](#)

Main Idea: According to God’s Word, there’s a vital connection between hospitality and love. In fact, in order to engage in hospitality as we ought, we need to grasp three truths the Bible teaches us about love.

I. In order to show hospitality, we need to understand what love is.

A. Love is what God is (Ex 15:13; Deut 7:9; Psalm 89:1-2).

B. Love is what God requires (Matt 22:35-40; Heb 6:10).

1. We see it in the Ten Commandments (Rom 13:8-10).

2. We see it in the Beatitudes.

C. Love is what we lack.

1. We tend to equate love with feelings of infatuation (Jd 16:4; 2 Sam 13:1-2).

2. We tend to settle for externals (Matt 23:5-7; 1 Cor 13:1-3).

II. In order to show hospitality, we need to understand what love does.

A. It gives (John 13:34-35).

1. We give ourselves to the Lord first (John 14:15-24).

2. We give ourselves to people next (John 15:9-17).

3. We even give ourselves to our enemies (Matt 5:43-46).

B. It grows (Phil 1:9).

1. You can see it (3 John 5-6; 2 Cor 8:7-8, 24).

2. You never arrive (1 Thes 3:6, 12; 4:9-10; Heb 10:24).

III. In order to show hospitality, we need to understand what makes love possible.

A. You must know Christ (John 17:26; 1 John 4:7-10; 2 Tim 1:7).

B. You must depend upon the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22; Rom 5:5).

C. You must die to self (2 Tim 3:1-5; Rev 12:11).

Take Inventory: If we are going to put love into practice...

1. We must get to know the people God has placed in our lives.

2. We must make hospitality a priority in our schedule and budget.

3. We must look to Christ for daily strength.

There's no place like home.

The Lord illustrated that reality for me this week in a persuasive way when the snowstorm hit, and more specifically, when we lost our electricity at the house, first Tuesday evening, and then again Wednesday morning. By Wednesday evening, there was still no power, and so Sherry and I enjoyed a gourmet dinner of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches by candlelight. Afterwards, we moved from the dining room into the dark living room, Sherry on the couch, and I in the recliner, both of us wearing our winter coats and wrapped up in a blanket.

Then it dawned on me that it was only 6:30 in the evening and we couldn't do any of the things we would typically do on a Wednesday evening. We couldn't go to church, since services were cancelled. We couldn't watch television. We couldn't read a book. We couldn't do any of the household projects that needed attention. And so we sat there in the darkness, and talked, and realized how dependent we've become on electricity!

But something else struck me. You see, we could have left our house and spent the night with someone else, for we had at least two offers from church family members who still had electricity. And we appreciated the offers, but the fact is, *there's no place like home*, even if home is a little darker and chillier than usual, it's still home.

I later learned we weren't alone in our assessment. I found out that others from our church family who were powerless also chose to stay at home, even though they also received similar offers.

It doesn't matter how elaborate or basic our homes might be. There's just no place like home.

When we open our Bibles we discover that God intends for us to maximize the wonder of home for His glory. For starters, it's in our homes that He intends for primary discipleship to take place, as dads and moms pass on the faith to the next generation (Deut. 6:7). But He didn't give us our homes *solely* for family purposes, primarily, yes, but not solely. He wants us to use our homes to minister to those *outside* of our families, too. To neighbors, to church family members, even to strangers.

In His Word He calls it *hospitality*. Listen to the following Scriptures...

Romans 12:10 "Be devoted to one another in brotherly **love**. Honor one another above yourselves." And three verses later...

Romans 12:13 "Share with God's people who are in need. Practice **hospitality**."

1 Peter 4:8 "Above all, **love** each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins." And in the next verse...

1 Peter 4:9 "Offer **hospitality** to one another without grumbling."

Hebrews 13:1-2 "Keep on **loving** each other as brothers. Do not forget to **entertain strangers** [Greek, *philoxenia*, same word translated 'hospitality' in Rom 12:13], for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it."

Each of these passages does two things. In each we're commanded to offer *hospitality*. What's more, each passage makes it clear that hospitality is intended to be a tangible expression of *love*. God intends for love and hospitality to go hand in hand. If we're serious about demonstrating love, we must get serious about the practice of hospitality. And if we're serious about practicing hospitality, we must do it, not for self-promoting reasons (like to impress folks with our house or cooking skills), but as an expression of our *love* for God and them.

Right here is the reason I've laid before our congregation two challenges in 2009. The first, which we've discussed the past two Sundays, is to *get more lines in the water*, to look for ways to make Christ

known to lost people. The second is to give increased attention to *hospitality* this year.

I would assume that charge is raising some questions in your minds, and rightly so. Why hospitality? And what exactly do you mean by hospitality? And, if I accept the charge, how does hospitality work? We're going to take three weeks, the Lord willing, to open our Bibles together and seek to answer those important questions.

To begin this morning, I want to show you the vital connection between hospitality and love. In fact, in order to engage in hospitality as we ought, we need to grasp three truths the Bible teaches us about love.

I. In order to show hospitality, we need to understand what love is.

There are over 800 references to love in the Bible, and a survey of them would lead us to three important discoveries.

A. Discovery #1: Love is what God is (Ex 15:13; Deut 7:9; Psalm 89:1-2). By nature, God is love.

--Exodus 15:13 "In your *unfailing love* you will lead the people you have redeemed..."

--Deuteronomy 7:9 "Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his *covenant of love* to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands."

--Psalm 89:1-2 "I will sing of the *LORD's great love* forever; with my mouth I will make your faithfulness known through all generations. I will declare that *your love stands firm forever....*"

If you want to know what love is, then look at God. God defines love. Look at His actions and you'll see love. And of course, look at His Son and you'll see the climax of His love. "But *God demonstrates his own love for us* in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8)."^[2]

So there's discovery #1. Love is what God is.

B. Discovery #2: Love is what God requires (Matt 22:35-40; Heb 6:10). In His Word, the Lord calls us to love many things. We're to love God's house (Psalm 26:8), God's salvation (Psalm 40:16), God's name (Psalm 69:36), and God's commands (Psalm 119:127). And that's just for starters. The Scriptures also exhort us to love mercy (Micah 6:8) and truth (Zechariah 8:19). In fact, it's the lack of the latter that keeps people from salvation according to 2 Thessalonians 2:10, "They perish because they *refused to love the truth* and so be saved."

You say, "That list is too big. Can you simplify it? What does God require of us?" Jesus reduced the answer to two categories in Matthew 22:35-40: "...An expert in the law tested him with this question: 'Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?' Jesus replied: '*Love the Lord your God* with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: '*Love your neighbor* as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

Plain and simple, that's what God requires of us. Love the Lord with all you've got. Then love your neighbor with the same tenacity you show to meet your own needs. Love God. Love neighbor. That's it.

Fifty percent obedience won't cut it either. Our love for God and people go hand in hand. Hebrews 6:10 puts it this way, "God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them." When we show love to God's people, we're showing that we love God. Indeed, it's impossible to love God and not love His people.

We see this dual theme throughout the Scriptures.

1. *We see it in the Ten Commandments (Rom 13:8-10).* God used Ten Commands to sum up what He expected of His people, Israel. The first four pertain to one's relationship with God (have no other gods, no idols, no misuse of His name, honor the Sabbath), whereas the next six address man's relationship with fellow man (honor your parents, no murder, no adultery, no stealing, no falsehood, no coveting).

Do you see what God was doing? In giving the Ten Commandments He was showing His people *how to love*, specifically how to love Him and each other. In fact, right after recording the Ten Commandments, Moses said this to his people in Deuteronomy 6:4-6, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. *Love the LORD your God* with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts."

Note the emphasis on "these commandments." What commandments? The ones just mentioned in chapter 5. God's commandments show us how to love.

Most people today think that love is a feeling and that it comes naturally. That's not true. Sinners don't know how to love, not as God intended. We must learn *how to love*—which is why God gave us the commandments. The commandments show us how to love Him and others (for another example, see Romans 13:8-10). But it's not just the commandments, either.

2. *We see it in the Beatitudes.* Jesus began the Sermon on the Mount, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." He proceeded to spell out seven more characteristics of "blessed" people, of God's kind of people. These eight traits do what the Ten Commandments did. They show us first how to have a proper *relationship with God* and next how to have a proper *relationship with people*. To love God you must be poor in spirit, mourn, be meek, and hunger for righteousness. To truly love people you must be merciful, pure in heart, a peacemaker, and be willing to be persecuted.

So love is what God requires. Quite frankly, that's why we're in trouble. I can illustrate the problem by conducting a little experiment...

Let's suppose we put three children in chairs at the same table and then placed in the middle five pieces of candy and said, "Eat up!". That's three children with five pieces of candy. What would happen? There's enough there for each child, right? But that's not the problem. Who gets *two* pieces? Or worse, who *doesn't*? That's the question that just might lead to World War III.

Now put six billion people on the planet, a planet designed by the Creator with plenty of resources to meet all their needs, and what happens? Those who have plenty are more than willing to help those who have need, right? Not exactly.

What's the problem? The problem at the children's table is the same as the problem in the world. Which brings us to our third discovery...

C. Discovery #3: Love is what we lack. Perhaps you're thinking, "Who me? Lack love? No way. I'm a very loving person." Hold on. Based on whose definition of love, yours or God's? Listen again to Jesus in the Beatitudes. This is love. Love is being merciful to those who wrong us. Love is having a pure heart (that is, not only doing good deeds but having a motive that is totally selfless). Love is being a peacemaker, that is, being willing to leave your comfort zone and help others resolve conflict. And love is being willing suffer persecution from the hands of the very people you're trying to help.

According to Jesus, that's what love is. And if we'll be honest with ourselves, that's what we lack. By nature, we have a self-centered focus, and it shows up even in the best of our relationships. Chuck Swindoll tells the following story about a married couple:

"Both of them were celebrating their sixtieth birthdays, and their fortieth wedding anniversary. During their quiet evening together, a fairy appeared and said, 'Because you have been such a loving couple all these forty years, I want to grant each of you a wish. The fairy pointed her wand to the woman first. Being a faithful, loving spouse, the wife wished for an all-expense-paid cruise to a romantic Caribbean island for her and her beloved. Whoosh! Instantly the tickets appeared in her hand. She squealed and

beamed with delight. Next the fairy turned her wand to the husband to grant whatever he asked. The man pulled the fairy aside and whispered, 'In all honesty, I'd love to have a wife thirty years younger than I am.' The fairy wiggled her nose, waved her wand and poof! He was suddenly ninety years old."^[3]

Beloved, loving God and others isn't natural. Loving *self* is. What's more, the Bible reveals two specific reasons why we don't love as we ought.

1. *We tend to equate love with feelings of infatuation (Judges 16:4; 2 Sam 13:1-2).* Like Samson did in Judges 16:4. The Bible says, "Some time later, he *fell in love* with a woman in the Valley of Sorek whose name was Delilah." If you know anything about Samson you know that he had a problem with women. He was a hulk of a man with a body that could kill, but he didn't have a clue about how to love a woman. He felt physical attraction to Delilah and thought it was love.

The same misconception surfaced in Amnon's life in 2 Samuel 13:1-2, "In the course of time, Amnon son of David *fell in love* with Tamar, the beautiful sister of Absalom son of David. Amnon became frustrated to the point of illness on account of his sister Tamar, for she was a virgin, and it seemed impossible for him to do anything to her."

That's how many today view love. Love is something you fall into—and can fall out of. Love is getting to express your selfish desires with someone. Love is sex. But that's not love. That's lust. Young ladies, when the guy says, "If you love me you'll let me," tell him, "Get lost Amnon!"

And another warning, young people. Just because your heart starts flipping when you're in the presence of a certain person doesn't mean there's love or that you should pursue a relationship with that person. Seek God's will and you may discover your heart *stops flipping!* Don't equate love with feelings of infatuation.

2. *We tend to settle for externals (Matt 23:5-7; 1 Cor 13:1-3).* Remember what Jesus said about the Pharisees in Matthew 23:5-7? "Everything they do is done for men to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long; they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; they love to be greeted in the marketplaces and to have men call them 'Rabbi.'" They had a love problem. They were religious, but they lacked something. What? Jesus told them in John 5:42, "But I know you. I know that *you do not have the love of God in your hearts.*"

You can do good things, even religious things, but if you lack genuine love for God and others, it's a big zero. Paul made it personal in 1 Corinthians 13:1-3: "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, *but have not love, I gain nothing.*"

Brothers and sisters, if we're going to engage in God-honoring hospitality, it's vital that we understand, first of all, *what love is*. Secondly...

II. In order to show hospitality, we need to understand what love does.

That's right. According to the Bible, love *does* something., two things in fact...

A. It gives (John 13:34-35). If you forget all other references from this study, don't forget this one, **John 13:34-35**. It's here we read the words Jesus spoke to the disciples the night before He went to the cross: "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Ponder that for a moment. The way we love each other should resemble the way Christ loved us. How did Christ love us? He put His own interests aside and left heaven. He loved us selflessly by

becoming a man. He saw our need and went to the cross. His sole aim in life was to please His Father and to help others.

Which highlights the fundamental difference between human notions of love and true biblical love. In human love, we think about self. Even in the most noble expressions of human love, we think about what we're going to get. We calculate. If I do this, how will I benefit?

But God's kind of love is totally selfless. Jesus denied Himself. He chose to become a sacrifice. He chose to *give His life* for the benefit of others. That is love. And that's what He calls His followers to do, "You are to love each other the same way I have loved you!"

Do you know what that means? We can never love each other too much! It's true. Look at the person in the pew in front of you. You can never love that person too much!

True love gives. That's its focus. But to whom are we to give ourselves?

1. *We give ourselves to the Lord first (John 14:15-24)*. But what does that mean? Remember the connection we saw earlier between *love* and *commands*? It's not love to do what you *feel* like doing. It's love when you choose to do what the Lord commands, regardless how you feel. "If you love me," Jesus said in John 14:15, "You will obey what I command."

You say, "I want to be a loving person." Okay, then begin here. In order to love as God intends we must give ourselves to the Lord first.

2. *We give ourselves to people next (John 15:9-17)*. In His upper room discourse Jesus continued His emphasis on love in John 15:9-17, "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: *Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this*, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command..." He reiterates in verse 17, "This is my command: *Love each other.*"

Again, here's the focus of true love. It's on others, Jesus said, and specifically on *each other*. Granted, we are to love everyone, but especially other believers (see also 1 Peter 2:17 and 1 John 3:11). It's fine to give to world relief programs and serve in community service organizations, but Jesus said all men will know we are His disciples if we *love one other*. Quite frankly, it's easy to say we love people in general and fail to love the people of God in particular. When we're loving as God desires, we give ourselves to the Him first, then to people next. But true love doesn't stop there.

3. *We even give ourselves to our enemies (Matt 5:43-46)*. Jesus said in Matthew 5:43-46, "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: *Love your enemies* and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?"

Anybody can give when there's a kickback in return, but Jesus said, "Do it with your enemies, too, just like your Father does." That's what true love does. It gives.

If that's what love does, if it *gives*, can you see why hospitality is so important? Hospitality is all about *giving*. To show hospitality, you must give up your privacy and your time and your easy chair and your stain-free carpet. You will give away your food, maybe your spare bed, maybe even *your* bed. But that's what love does. It *gives*.

There's more. When we scan our Bibles we also discover this about love...

B. It grows (Phil 1:9). That was Paul's prayer request for the believers in Philippians 1:9, "And this is my prayer: that *your love may abound more and more* in knowledge and depth of insight..."

Love is supposed to be growing. That would indicate a couple of things...

1. *You can see it (3 John 5-6; 2 Cor 8:7-8, 24).* There will be evidence for it. What kind of evidence? Here's one kind, the kind John saw in his friend Gaius's life and wrote about in 3 John 5-6, "Dear friend, you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers, even though they are strangers to you. *They have told the church about your love.* You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God."

There was proof for Gaius's love. What was it? He entertained traveling missionaries. He opened his home and shared his food with them.

It's easy to say you love missionaries. The proof is when you use what the Lord has loaned you to help them, your money to support them, your time to pray for them, your home to care for their practical needs.

Yes, you're going to have to give up some things, including your money, if you're serious about ministry. Paul talked pointedly to the Corinthian Christians about this in 2 Corinthians 8:7-8:

"But just as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us—see that you also excel in this grace of giving. I am not commanding you, but I want to *test the sincerity of your love* by comparing it with the earnestness of others." And in verse 24 "Therefore *show these men the proof of your love* and the reason for our pride in you, so that the churches can see it."

When a person says he loves the Lord but refuses to give generously to the Lord's work—even though he spends hundreds of dollars every month on cable television, movie rentals, dining out, new clothes, hobbies, and other things he doesn't really need—he shows what he really loves. The thing about true love is this. You can see *it*. As is this...

2. *You never arrive (1 Thes 3:6, 12; 4:9-10; Heb 10:24).* There's always room to grow. The Thessalonian believers are a great example. In 1 Thessalonians 3:6 Paul wrote: "But Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought *good news about your faith and love.*" So Paul commended them for their love. Yet just a few verses later, however, he said this in verse 12, "May the Lord *make your love increase and overflow* for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you."

Check out 1 Thessalonians 4:9-10 and Hebrews 10:24 and you'll see this same emphasis on growing in love, making it clear we never arrive. So answer this. What are ways you are giving yourself to the Lord and others today that you weren't doing five years ago? Are there new evidences that your love is growing?

One more truth about love. If we're going to show hospitality in 2009, we need to grasp what love is, what love does, and...

III. In order to show hospitality, we need to understand what makes love possible.

If you're going to love God's way, you must do three things, all by His grace.

A. You must know Christ (John 17:26; 1 John 4:7-10; 2 Tim 1:7). The reason is clear. Until Christ enters our lives, we are slaves to our self-centered interests.

Listen to 1 John 4:7-8, "Dear friends, let us love one another, for *love comes from God.* Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love."

If loving people is a grind to you and if giving to meet needs cramps your style, and if you want to change, here's where it starts. You must know Christ. Don't rush at this point. It's not enough to know *about* Christ. It's not enough to say you know Christ. You must *know Christ*. For it's then that you receive

the capacity to love.

Perhaps you're thinking, "I'm a Christian, but I just can't love so-and-so." Not so. You can do it and here's why, as Paul reminded Timothy in 2 Timothy 1:7 "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline."

B. You must depend upon the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22; Rom 5:5). Galatians 5:22 states, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love..." Love isn't something we manufacture. It's not a work of the flesh. It's fruit that the Spirit produces. As Romans 5:5 declares, "God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us."

You can be in Christ but not depending on Christ, and if so, you'll lack love. But if you are in Christ and day by day depending on His Spirit, you will exhibit love. The Holy Spirit has come to reproduce the very life and love of Jesus Himself in us.

But something must happen, something you must do.

C. You must die to self (2 Tim 3:1-5; Rev 12:11). Galatians 5:24-25 explains, "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit."

In order to love God and others, we must get our eyes off of ourselves. Self-love destroys biblical love. Ironically, self-love is something our humanistic culture praises as a great virtue. "Believe in yourself," educators teach their students. "Stand up for yourself," parents tell their kids. "Take time for yourself first," the marriage therapist says, "Or you won't be able to love your husband and children."

It's a lie, beloved. It's also alarming since the Bible warns that self-love is a characteristic of the last days (see 2 Timothy 3:1-5). In stark contrast, Revelation 12:11 describes a group of people who resist the Evil One and overcome the spirit of the age. How do they do it? "They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they *did not love their lives* so much as to shrink from death."

We can be different, dear friends, but to do so we must know Christ, we must depend upon His Spirit, and we must die to self.

We've seen today three pre-requisites for hospitality. In order to show hospitality, we must understand what love is, what love does, and what makes love possible. Now let's consider three very practical responses...

Take Inventory: If we are going to put love into practice...

1. *We must get to know the people God has placed in our lives.* You can't love somebody unless you know them. You can't love your wife, men, unless you know her. You can't love your children, parents, unless you know them. You can't love your neighbors unless you know them. You can't love your church family unless you make the effort to get to know them.

A common complaint around churches is, "I just don't feel like I know anybody in my church. It's not a very friendly place." Alexander Strauch offers a very practical solution to that concern, "I have a suggestion that might solve the problem. It comes from a couple who had a hard time feeling as if they belonged in their congregation. Instead of leaving, as so many people do, they decided to invite every person in the church to their home for dinner during the next year. By the end of the year, they knew everyone in the church and had made a number of close friendships!"^[4]

I urge you to use your home this year to get to know the people God has placed in your life. For sure, start with your family members. Eat your meals together. Turn off the television and talk to each other. But not just your family members. Invite your church family members over, and not just those you already know. Reach out to folks you don't know in the church. And to your neighbors, too.

Alexander Strauch goes so far as to say, "Your home is the best tool you have to enhance loving Christian community."^[5]

2. *We must make hospitality a priority in our schedule and budget.* If you don't schedule it, it probably won't happen. And if you don't budget for it, it probably won't either. Set aside one Sunday noon meal a month to show hospitality in your home. And set aside the necessary money in your budget so you can share your lives with some folks around a meal. And it doesn't have to be elaborate. One of the most meaningful times I ever enjoyed on the receiving end of hospitality was when a missionary couple invited me to their home and served tuna fish on crackers. A simple meal and a gourmet conversation!

But if we're going to put love into practice, or do anything else that pleases God...

3. *We must look to Christ for daily strength.* He truly is all we need!

^{**}Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

^[1] This message was built upon a sermon preached at WBC in 2004 as part of a series "Seven Values of a Strong Church."

^[2] See also Romans 8:38-39 "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the *love of God* that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

^[3] Told by C. Swindoll, *Paul: A Man of Grace and Grit*, p. 223.

^[4] Strauch, p. 18.

^[5] Alexander Strauch, *The Hospitality Commands*, p. 19