



Radical Hospitality

Brent Bossi - 11/18/2025

Good Morning! Pastor Brian is out of town enjoying the fall traditions of Missouri and will be back later this week. My name is Brent Bossi, and I work at The Downtown Church as the Community Coordinator. My wife, Beverly, and I have been attending The Downtown Church since 2015, which is our sixth church home since getting married, mostly because we've lived in different parts of the country.

If you don't know me yet, I am inherently an introvert. So when we visited a church for the first time my core goal was minimal contact. I did not want to get trapped into a prolonged conversation about me or about the church. My goal was a cup of coffee, maybe a couple of simple "Hellos" to strangers, and then get settled into a pew.

From there I would soak in everything around me about the church and the congregation. I looked for warmth, love, and acceptance. If I did not see those three things, or felt like I had not been at least seen, despite my introverted tendencies, then I did not feel welcomed to return to the church.

I am beginning to think I am really high maintenance—my criteria on a first church visit was "Don't talk to me but make sure I feel accepted."

And that is ok! News flash, human beings are very complicated and can show up in a variety of ways. And that does provide churches, and us, with an interesting challenge and responsibility.

Since everybody is unique, we can all have different expectations when visiting a new church. Each of us is somewhere on the spectrum from introvert to extrovert. In addition, on any given day someone can be experiencing different emotions: joy, hope, anger, skepticism, pain, or sadness, to name a few, which can change—or even amplify—what they need that particular day when visiting a church.

Obviously, a lot also depends on why they made the choice to step into a place of worship, or join online worship, in the first place.

Now take a moment and think of someone **you** wish would walk through the doors of this church—or any church—for the first time. If that someone you cared for walked through the east doors of this church next Sunday, how would you hope that I greeted them? While I think all of your answers would be slightly different, I imagine they would all revolve around greeting them warmly, showing that this is a *place of refuge in the storm of life*.

Last September Brian sent me to a church conference called First Impressions in Kansas City. They focused on the responsibility every church faces.

An early takeaway from the conference for me was that any new person walking into this church can be Somebody's Someone. A person someone has been praying for to find the courage to walk into a church of strangers. Our starting point as a church to bring community, comfort and safety to a guest—to be a place of refuge in the storm of life—begins with providing Radical Hospitality.

And make no mistake, hospitality *is* Biblical—very much so, starting in Genesis and arcing all through the Bible to Jesus Christ.

Genesis chapter 18 describes Abraham as the consummate host when rushing to prepare the finest food for three visitors, one of whom appears to be the Lord (YHWH). During the dinner Abraham and Sarah learn that despite their advanced age, they will give birth to their first son Isaac. After the three

visitors dine with Abraham, they set out to the city of Sodom. Abraham, again the consummate host, “went with them to set them in their way.”

When they arrived, the visitors were not treated well by the residents of Sodom, in fact they were directly threatened. And by chapter 19, Sodom and Gomorrah are destroyed by the Lord because of their inhospitable treatment of others and social injustices. The juxtaposition of these stories when read in their full context—Abraham’s warm hospitality and Sodom’s breach of hospitality—right next to each other in the Book of Genesis is striking. Genesis is showing that hospitality is a cornerstone in the Kingdom of God.

In fact, hospitality is rooted throughout the Old Testament, and hence throughout Jewish culture. In her book, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*, Dr. Christine Pohl describes the corresponding and reciprocal responsibility of hospitality this way:

Images of God as gracious and generous host pervade the biblical materials. God provides manna and quail daily in the wilderness for a hungry and often ungrateful people. God offers shelter in a hot and dry land and refreshment through living water. Israel's covenant identity includes being a stranger, an alien, a tenant in God's land—both dependent on God for welcome and provision and answerable to God for its own treatment of aliens and strangers.

Jesus grew up in this culture of hospitality and THEN expands it, showing his disciples mind-blowing examples of hospitality in his actions and words. Jesus shows hospitality extends beyond Israel’s covenant identity to everyone.

For example, in my last message I talked about Jesus encountering the Samaritan Woman at the Well. Jesus talks with the Samaritan woman, alone, in broad daylight at Jacob’s Well. The fact that she’s Samaritan, a woman, and

that Jesus is talking to her alone, in broad daylight, breaks at least four cultural prejudices at once.

The disciples were away gathering food and returned to see Jesus talking with the woman. Instead of taking a cue, or lesson, from their teacher that things are different now, they cannot get past their own cultural prejudice to ask a simple question “Why?” They could not ask, “Teacher—why are you speaking with this Samaritan woman?” Instead, scripture says they did *nothing*. They did nothing to make her feel welcome, zero hospitality. They had their own little clique, and she was barred from it.

This example is just one of many showing that the disciples of Jesus did not understand how to extend and expand the Jewish culture of hospitality. Bishop Robert Schnase of the United Methodist Church, author of *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations*, lists Radical Hospitality as a key practice, and summarized the disciples’ confusion this way on hospitality:

At every turn, the disciples seem ready to draw boundaries and distinctions that keep people at a distance from Jesus. They have a thousand reasons to ignore, avoid, and thwart the approach of people, reminding Jesus that some of these people are too young, too sick, too sinful, too Roman, too blind or too Gentile to deserve his attention.

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus shows and reminds his disciples that inviting and being hospitable to all groups of people is truly the way to follow Him. Paul then took the charge in his letters to remind Christians of the early church to practice hospitality. In Hebrews Chapter 13 he wrote:

¹ Let mutual affection continue. ² Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.

A nice little throwback to Abraham being the consummate host to the three visitors we discussed earlier, but I also want to share Bishop Schnase's words on this passage and how angels are folded into all of our lives:

The people we befriend often prove to be those through whom God graces us. Churches change when they form relationships with new comers and accept their spiritual gifts and faith experiences. Ministry expands. God uses newcomers to breathe new life into communities of faith.

That last sentence is true for The Downtown Church when attendance was around 50 people in 2015. Today, I am lucky enough to still have great friends from high school and college; but I am also lucky enough to have great friends and a support community from this church who I have met just in the last 10 years.

There's another theological component to hospitality - it's Grace.

We all grow through grace, and hospitality is tied to grace. Deeply. John Wesley described God's Prevenient Grace as ever-present to everyone, always inviting all of us to step into a life of faith.

When we have a guest in this church, we are called to invite them to be present where community and Christ intersect, where they can grow in their faith in a safe and caring place, and where together we can grow as a community.

As the church, we are the eyes, ears, hands and feet of Christ in this world doing good works; but our acts of hospitality also show the heart of God through us and invite others to be part of the body Christ.

I think The Downtown Church does a great job of welcoming new guests, but we must always be self-aware. Every Sunday morning there's a healthy buzz of conversation in the coffee area, Sunday school classes, and the sanctuary before service. I love that some folks hang out in the sanctuary and listen to

band practice. But, if we get too comfortable in our weekly rituals and groups, our strength can turn into a weakness.

We can all-too-easily fall into the natural human tendencies of staying within our own groups, inadvertently excluding guests. Bishop Schnase described how one of our greatest strengths can turn into a weakness this way:

These tight-knit friendships become impenetrable to others, cliquish with a closeness that closes out new people. Those on the inside don't even notice: they feel content because their own needs are met. The church becomes inward-focused, blind to guests who feel like outsiders, and oblivious to the people who live in the immediate neighborhood.

I would appreciate it if each of you would think about what *you* can do to keep that strength a strength, and I am going to give you at least one way to help avoid being an inward-focused church.

Here it is, the one thing that you can do every Sunday to help ensure that The Downtown Church avoids the trap of turning inward: Say “Hello” to an unfamiliar face.

Now let's talk about this a little because I just felt every introvert in this room tense up a little. :)

We recently finished a series called Building Bonfires, where we talked about using our spiritual gifts to build a long-lasting fire here that is warm and safe for people to explore their faith with Jesus Christ. For you **extroverts** in the crowd, I need you to pick up your fellow **introverts** and say “hi” to people - this is in your wheelhouse while us introverts sometimes feel a wall of dread when walking up to a stranger.

But to my introverts - you don't need to be a wild-eyed crazy extrovert like Pastor Brian to greet someone new. Go ahead and get a little uncomfortable and just say “Hi” to somebody - that's it! But if you are feeling a little more

comfortable, introduce yourself, and ask for their name. Perhaps they're actually a regular. Maybe they're visiting family here. Maybe it really is their first time.

Now, it could be, and I did this last Sunday myself, it could be that you introduce yourself to someone you've already met. And, in the unfortunate event that you prove yourself human, having forgotten a previous meeting, well, then you're providing *them* the opportunity to show grace, and you've started a conversation full of possibilities with a shared chuckle.

Seriously though, keep this in mind. The unfamiliar face you see in church may be 'Somebody's Someone' looking for a place of refuge in the storm of life.

When 'Somebody's Someone' pulls into our parking lot, the seven minutes it takes to park and work their way to a seat in a pew will likely determine whether they will return to The Downtown Church. How we greet and welcome someone initially has a far greater impact than what the actual message is that day.

Jesus entrusted this with us—we are the body of Christ—and we are collectively called to follow his lead in hospitality.