LIVING WELL #17: SHOWING HOSPITALITY WELL

ESV TCL 2026/11/15

Q1. Discuss:

'The traditional saying "an Englishman's home is his castle" still holds cultural weight. Homes are viewed as private sanctuaries, so inviting casual acquaintances or strangers to stay overnight is much less common than in some other cultures.' [1]



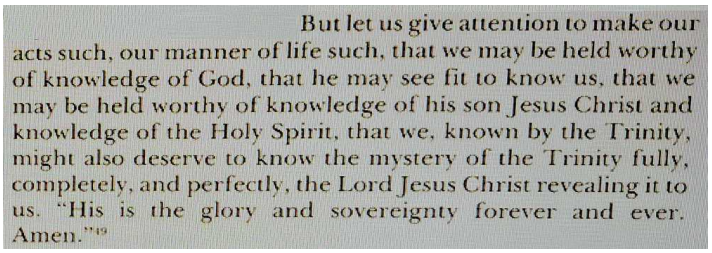
1. IN THE BEGINNING …

The NT has specific words for hospitality, but the Hebrew Bible does not, instead teaching hospitality repeatedly in its narrative. An early church leader, Origen (185 – c.253 AD)[2] preached on Genesis 18 and 19 comparing and contrasting Abraham's and Lot's approach to hospitality[3]:

***Homilies on Genesis* (Homily IV, Section 1)**

"Three men, therefore, come to Abraham at midday; two come to Lot and in the evening. For Lot could not receive the magnitude of midday light; but Abraham was capable of receiving the full brightness of the light."

Abraham's attitude (Genesis 18:1-5) is seen as superior by far, but even righteous Lot living in ungodly Sodom sees the great importance of showing hospitality (Genesis 19:3). Thus, hospitality is seen to demarcate the righteous from earliest times, even sharing in the Holy Trinity in some sense!


But let us give attention to make our acts such, our manner of life such, that we may be held worthy of knowledge of God, that he may see fit to know us, that we may be held worthy of knowledge of his son Jesus Christ and knowledge of the Holy Spirit, that we, known by the Trinity, might also deserve to know the mystery of the Trinity fully, completely, and perfectly, the Lord Jesus Christ revealing it to us. "His is the glory and sovereignty forever and ever. Amen."[19]

2. LATER

In the NT, the apostle Paul teaches the same principle more directly:

Romans 12:13 Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality [φιλοξενία (philoxenía[4])]*. ESV*

And one NT letter is almost entirely concerned with the subject of *hospitality*.[5]

3. NOWADAYS

The writer to the Hebrews may well be alluding to Abraham and Lot in Genesis 18 and 19 when he writes:

Hebrews 13:2 Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers [φιλοξενία (philoxenía[4])]*, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. ESV*

But what exactly constitutes biblical *hospitality* and what is its theological significance? The following table may help us to see various biblical angles on *hospitality*, especially towards strangers. Look up the passages in **bold** print.

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1 Unattributed AI statement.
2 Origen popularised the Allegorical school of biblical hermeneutics. Notice his appeal to day and evening, light and darkness.
3 Origen, *Homilies on Genesis* 18 & 19, English translation made from the surviving Latin translation of Rufinus of Aquileia.
4 Although dangerous, etymology nevertheless reveals the roots of this word as being for love or friendship towards strangers.
5 Although it never uses the precise word φιλοξενία. Note, however the NIV in 3 John 8.

Q2. What can we learn from these examples? [Work upwards from level **0** to level **7**.]

7 (or 8) Biblical Levels of Hospitality		
7	The feast in the eternal kingdom of heaven	The parable of the narrow door and the feast in **Luke 13:22-30**. Lord's supper as a foretaste.
6	Adopting into the family	Joseph & Jesus; Mordecai & Esther; Pharaoh's daughter & Moses; also **Romans 8:15**
5	Caring for others	The Gentile Samaritan in **Luke 10:30-37**
4	Welcoming others into the home	Job in **Job 31:32**; Lot in Genesis 19
3	Hosting meetings	Gaius (Titius Justus?) in **Romans 16:23a**
2	Entertaining others	Abraham in Genesis 18; Levi in **Mark 2:15-17**
1	Eating & drinking with others	Jesus in **Luke 15:1-2**
0	Receiving hospitality	God's providence for us in **Genesis 2:8-15**. Blind Arameans (Syrians) in **2 Kings 6:18-23**.

Notice how hospitality begins (levels 0 & 1) and ends (levels 6 & 7) with God, but we (1 to 6) are called to be hospitable too, in God's image.

4. The Consequences of showing hospitality

Many biblical events involve hospitality, sometimes seemingly unnecessarily.

Genesis 19:15-16 As morning dawned, the angels urged Lot, saying, "Up! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, lest you be swept away in the punishment of the city." 16 But he lingered. So the men seized him and his wife and his two daughters by the hand, the LORD being merciful to him, and they brought him out and set him outside the city [of Sodom]. *ESV*

Q3. What were the effects of *Lot* having shown the visiting *angels* overnight hospitality?

Genesis 18:20-21 Then the LORD said [to Abraham]*, 'The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous 21 that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know.' ESV*

Q4. What were the consequences of Abraham showing the LORD hospitality?

Luke 19:1-10 [Jesus] *entered Jericho and was passing through. 2 And there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. 3 And he was seeking to see*

who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small of stature. [4] So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way. [5] And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today." [6] So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. [7] And when they saw it, they all grumbled, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." [8] And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold." [9] And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. [10] For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." ESV

Q5. Why was hospitality so important in this story?

Acts 28:7-10 There was an estate near by that belonged to Publius, the chief official of the island [of Malta]. *He welcomed us* [in]*to his home and showed us generous <u>hospitality</u>* [φιλοφρόνως (philophrónōs) hospitably] *for three days. [8] His father was ill in bed, suffering from fever and dysentery. Paul went in to see him and, after prayer, placed his hands on him and healed him. [9] When this had happened, the rest of those on the island who were ill came and were cured. [10] They honoured us in many ways; and when we were ready to sail, they furnished us with the supplies we needed. NIV*

Q6. How did *Publius*' hospitality benefit Malta and beyond?

1 Timothy 3:2-4 Now the overseer [fn 6] is to be above reproach [fn 7], faithful to his wife [fn 8], temperate, self-controlled, respectable, <u>hospitable</u>, able to teach, [3] not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. [4] He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, … NIV

Q7. How important in this list is being *hospitable*?

1 Timothy 5:9-10 No widow may be put on the list of widows unless she is over sixty, has been faithful to her husband, [10] and is well known for her good deeds, such as bringing up children, showing hospitality, washing the feet of the Lord's people, helping those in trouble and devoting herself to all kinds of good deeds. NIV

This is not the easiest text to make sense of nowadays, nevertheless:

Q8. Is the showing of *hospitality* only a qualification for Christian men/husbands/elders?

6 [ἐπίσκοπος (episkopos) *overseer*] i.e. elder; words such as overseer, elder, shepherd seem to be used interchangeably in the NT.
7 This seems to be the basic requirement, the following list being epexegetical (i.e. an expansion),
8 Seems more likely than simply monogamous.

Luke 10:38-42 As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. [39] She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. [40] But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, 'Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!'

[41] 'Martha, Martha,' the Lord answered, 'you are worried and upset about many things, [42] but few things are needed – or indeed only one [fn9]. Mary has chosen what is better [fn10], and it will not be taken away from her.' NIV

Q9. Why was *Mary* being so apparently inhospitable?

2 John 9-10 Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. [10] If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take them into your house or welcome them. NIV

Q10. What unusual command about hospitality is given here?

Scripture teaches a high view of hospitality. In many places it is simply assumed to be a good thing (e.g. **Titus 1:8**); in some it is mandatory (Romans 12:13). It is often associated with new people being reached with the gospel, and usually brings blessings that are physical, temporal but, more importantly, eternal and spiritual (Luke 10:9).

Homework: Read **3 John** and notice how strongly hospitality features.



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9 A difficult textual problem. More recently scholars have tended to decide that the possibility of an ancient homoeoarcton makes the longer reading preferable. *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd Edition, Bruce M. Metzger p.129.

10 ἀγαθός (agathos) lit. good. In Koine Greek, positives are often correctly translated as comparatives or even superlatives, as in the NIV.