

03/13/11

Friend Request #1 – Hospitality for Busy Lives

- This past Sunday night we had a couple of great examples of the power and value of friendships in a local church setting...
- it was during our church family night and we had a marvelous group of men and women who participated in that time together...
- part of theme was how we are trying to serve Christ through our various youth and children's ministries and so we asked a couple of young people to share what God was doing in their lives...
- one of the testimonies was from Keith Taylor...Keith is a senior at Lafayette Jeff High School
 - his story is a perfect example of the way our philosophy of ministry is intended to work...
 - you couldn't have written the script any better...
 - Keith sings in one of the musical groups at Jeff and last year he participated in the Religious Arts Festival that we had the privilege of hosting on a Sunday night...
 - we encouraged our church family to come out and support these young people and their teachers in public schools who were learning a series of Christ-centered religious songs...and our church family did a marvelous job of welcoming the students and their parents and their teachers to our facility...and the kids did a great job of singing...
 - afterwards we had a time of fellowship in the gym and tried to show love to our guests every way we could...
 - people made homemade cookies and we just had a wonderful time together...
- what we didn't know at the time was that God had been working in Keith's heart...and he was looking for a place to go to church...
- Keith later said that he was so impacted by the way he was loved and accepted by the people here that he wanted to start coming regularly...even though he lives downtown, about 6 miles from here...
 - so Keith did what any motivated teenager might do when he wants to get from point a to point b...
 - he woke himself up on Sunday morning, jumped on his bicycle, and pedaled out here to church...6 miles, one way...
 - I met Keith in the Intro to Faith class a few weeks later and was stunned that a teenager would do that...
 - I mentioned his story at a Men's retreat we were having here in the Spring and several men approached me afterwards and offered to give Keith a ride to and from church...
 - I didn't have to beg – I didn't have to anything...people just wanted to reach out in Christian friendship and hospitality...
 - a lot has happened in the last year...
 - Keith has trusted Christ and been baptized...
 - he's finishing up his senior year at Jeff and about to enter military service...
 - but as Keith was telling his story last Sunday night...he mentioned four men from our church who had been mentoring him and giving him rides to church, Larry Cole, Jerry Jefson, Grant Whaley, and Pastor Woodall....
- that story illustrates exactly what we are trying to do with our community based outreach ministries...it's exactly why we would want to host a group like Jeff for their Religious Arts Festival and why we would emphasize the importance of attending an event like that and supporting the kids and their teachers and reaching out to their parents...

- but it also illustrates that this is not about activities or busyness...it's about the power of friendships...I could not be any more thankful as a pastor that the Lord would give us someone like Keith, and that men of our church would do such a great job of being his friend...
- a second interaction occurred when I was in the gym chowing down on chicken nuggets...
- remember that last Sunday was also our day of fasting and prayer and we decided to break the fast after our church family night...
 - someone standing by me in line said – “chicken nuggets have never tasted so good...”
 - but as I was moving away from the serving line...I ran into Alex Grady
 - do you know Alex?...if you don't know him personally, you probably recognize his name because we have been praying for him a lot...
 - Alex is a teenager in our church who has significant physical challenges which have resulted in his needing repeated surgeries to correct problems he has with his spine...
 - some of us have struggled with periods of back pain and we know how debilitating that can be...
 - but most of us would have no idea the kind of pain that Alex deals with on a daily basis...
 - Alex just recently had surgery and last Sunday even had to wear a wound vac which is a device to help with the healing process...
 - that's why I was so surprised to see Alex and his family here on church family night...
 - so I just sat down and got caught up on some of what's happening with his care and treatment right now...and then I walked away from that conversation thinking...
 - there's a young man who has every reason in the world to skip church and not want to be around people...
 - yet here he is...Living Life Together...ignoring the pain because he values the family...
 - and I thought...if nothing else had happened to me tonight other than spending a few minutes of friendship with Alex...this night was worth it, and I'm a better man because Alex was willing to be a friend to me, and to us...
- the good news is, there are many, many stories exactly like that played out week in and week out among our church family...
 - the power and value of friendships...
- however, many of us would say that in the busy world in which we live...with all of our duties and responsibilities along with our activities and our gadgets...making friendships a priority is a struggle...
 - I often have people tell me that they don't feel like they have any friends...
 - that's the point of the series we're beginning today and planning to do between today and Easter Sunday 7 weeks from now...
 - **Friend Request – the Art of Real Friendships....**
 - what are the principles from the Word of God that can help us make friendships the priority our Lord would want it to be...and what are some of the practical steps we can take to make that more of a reality for each one of us?...
- with that in mind, let me invite you to open your Bible this morning to Romans chapter 12...page 126 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you...
- this morning we're going to begin with a characteristic that has to be in place if we have any hope at all of developing friendships the way God desires...and that is ...understanding what God's Word says about hospitality...

- and I realize that one of the first concerns regarding that subject is just how busy many of us are already...and I can almost hear the “please don’t ask me to do anything else” plea as a silent response to this issue...
 - so let’s just face that head on...by talking about **Hospitality for Busy Lives...**
- read **Romans 12:1-13**
- so we’re talking about Hospitality for Busy Lives, and with the time we have remaining, let’s look for three principles to help us take the first steps toward building meaningful friendships....it starts just by understanding...

I. The Meaning of Hospitality

- the original word in Romans 12:13 is **philozenos...**
- at least the first half of that word may be familiar to you if you’ve been studying Scripture because *philew* is one of the words in the Bible that is translated love...
- just like Philadelphia – *philew* – love – *adelphos* – brother – Philadelphia is the city of brotherly love...
- hospitality starts in a very similar way – *philozenos* teaches us that...

A. Hospitality flows out of a loving heart.

- if you really don’t love people, you’ll never do what this passage of Scripture commands us to do...
- conversely...people who really have developed the ability to love the men and women God has placed in their lives will understand the importance and value of hospitality...
- and of course that immediately calls up a question, doesn’t it?...
 - how would rate yourself on the issue of growing in your love for others?...
 - and what does the amount of hospitality that you show reveal about the nature of your love?...
 - see, that’s what it was that someone like Keith Taylor found when he came here with his youth choir from a local public school...
 - and that is entirely consistent with what ought to be happening in a local church...
 - **John 13:35 - By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.**
 - being welcoming and inviting and hospitable to others is one of the signs that you really know Christ...
 - in fact, John went on to say in his first epistle... **1 John 5:1 - Whoever loves the Father loves the *child* born of Him.**
 - he also said... **1 John 4:20 - If someone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.**
 - now that’s all very important – I’m sure you would agree – but only half the equation here...the word is *philozenos*...what does the word *zenos* mean?...
 - the answer is – it means stranger, or the one who is unknown to you...and that’s the point here...

B. Extends to strangers and those who cannot reciprocate.

- one of the characteristics that marks out the people of God is that we have a genuine concern for strangers...persons who are new...people whom we don’t yet know...
- and that has always been true in the economy of God...even in the OT...
 - **Exodus 23:9 – You shall not oppress a stranger, since you yourselves know the feelings of a stranger, for you *also* were strangers in the land of Egypt.**

- **Leviticus 19:10 - Nor shall you glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the needy and for the stranger. I am the LORD your God.**

- don't you love serving a God who calls us to that kind of a life?...
- and of course this is even strengthened in the NT as we learn more of what it means for Christ can radically transform our hearts and lives...
- do you remember when Jesus was invited to a dinner and He watched the way people were trying to pick out places of honor at the table – using the event selfishly to advance their personal agenda...and here's what He said...
- **Luke 14:12-14 - And He also went on to say to the one who had invited Him, "When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, otherwise they may also invite you in return and *that* will be your repayment. "But when you give a reception, invite *the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind*, and you will be blessed, since they do not have *the means* to repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."**
- that's what biblical **hospitality** is...fondness and affection for strangers...

- now what else can we learn even from this short little phrase at the end of verse 13?....

C. Must be passionately pursued.

- Paul said, "**practicing hospitality**"
- and I realize you might say – where's the passion in that?...that's a fair question...
- the answer is, in the specific word Paul chose that is translated practice in our English version...diwkw (I'm sure that helps)...
- here's a parallel use that will make the point...
- find diwkw (the word translated practice in Roman 12:13) in this verse -- **Revelation 12:13 - And when the dragon saw that he was thrown down to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male *child*.**
- which word is the same as the one translated "practicing hospitality" back in Romans 12:13?...
- the word persecuted...and the picture in the book of Revelation is of the devil relentlessly pursuing this woman...whom we believe refers to Israel in that passage by the way...
- but regardless – the intensity is there...and that's the same word Paul chose...
- hospitality is something that ought to be passionately pursued by the people of God...
- well, we've only talked about 2 words in the text but there's already room for application, isn't there?...
- how are you doing at the matter of practicing hospitality?...
- are you cultivating a fondness and affection for strangers?...
- is it something you could honestly say you're passionately pursuing?...
- now before you say – but our house isn't nice enough...or I can't bake a cherry pie...or blah, blah, blah...
- let's not get caught up in all the details just yet...
- it starts with a heart...
- like even this morning...

- did you pray sometime last night...or sometime this morning...or sometime on that way over to church...Lord, please help me reach out to someone I don't know this morning?...
- Lord, help me be sensitive to someone who may be a stranger this morning?...
 - would that be a normal part of your prayer life...and if not, should you start that praying that way?...
- when you came into the foyer, were you on the lookout?...did you want to be sure that every person who walks into our church is met with a friendly handshake and a warm greeting?...I thought that was the greeter's job – no, that's everyone's job...
- let me ask you this – when you walk into the auditorium....where do you sit?...
 - do you purposely look for someone who may be worshipping by themselves and do you warmly befriend them?...
 - if we can't show hospitality in the church-house, what's the likelihood that we're going to show hospitality at our own house?...
- if you have children...did you talk with them about this very issue?...
 - do you role play with them?...OK – let's pretend we're in Sunday school...and mommy's going to be one of your friends...and you're coloring your paper with mommy...
 - and now sissy's going to come in...and she's like a new girl that comes to class and doesn't know anyone----what should you do, what should you say?...
 - that's good – ask her her name, tell her your name...ask her to come sit by you...share your crayons with her....etc, etc, etc...
- and then as your kids get older...start expecting that kind of behavior out of them...
 - that teenage boy of yours...the one who is eating you of house and home?...
 - you get home from church....everyone helps mom get supper on the table of course (teenagers included – please tell me you don't let your kids sit around while mom does everything...)
 - then you pray together – and then as soon as you say amen...and that teenage boy lunges for the fried chicken like he's starving to death and will probably expire in the next 10 seconds...
 - that's a good time for dad to loving give him a little fork in the wrist...
 - son, what are you doing?...
 - oh yeah, mom, could I pass you a piece of chicken...and please feel free to take that big chicken leg I was eying all through prayer time...
 - and sissy, can I pass you a piece?...here, can I help you cut it up?...
 - dad – would you like a piece...all the legs are gone now but there's this nice breast and then the neck...please take the breast...
 - and then he starts to take the last piece and dad says --- son, aren't you forgetting something?...
 - what's that?...I'd be interested in knowing if you did your job today or not?...remember, he who doesn't work shouldn't eat...
 - so what was the job you were assigned when you went to SS today just like every other day?...
 - oh yes, you taught me to be sure that I didn't just sit around in my little clique...and yes, dad---there was a new guy in my class and I went over and sat by him...
 - and there's someone else that I know gets picked on at school a lot...and I was sure that he was included...
 - and we have a handicapped child in our class...and I went out of my way to make him feel welcome...

- good job, son – enjoy that neck...

- see, the question is – are we going to take a passage of Scripture like this seriously or not?...
 - and please notice this – everything we just talked about did not require additional time...
 - it just meant using the time you're spending in an intentional fashion that values the people that God has placed around you...
- now, let's broaden our study out...this command was not given in isolation...what can we learn from the context to help us take steps of growth in this matter?...please think with me about...

II. The Foundation of Hospitality.

- many of you are familiar with the structure of the book of Romans...
- even if it is new to you, you may have noticed when we began reading, that the first word in verse one was...therefore...
- **Romans 12:1 - Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is your spiritual service of worship.***
- that tells us that we're at some kind of transition point...
- and the short version is that the first 121 chapters are highly doctrinal...the most comprehensive explanation of the doctrine of salvation found anywhere in Scripture...
- Paul starts by explaining the lost condition of men and women apart from Christ and how it is impossible for people who are sinful by nature and who have fallen woefully short of the glory of God to in any way earn merit before God on our own merits...
- then he launches into a marvelous discussion of the mercy of God and how God demonstrated His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us...
- and that a relationship with Him is established through faith in what Christ has done for us on our behalf...
- then he takes several chapters to begin to unpack what it means for newly redeemed children of God to begin growing and changing through the power of the Holy Spirit...
- he even explains the future of Israel and how this relationship with God was initiated by Him because of His great love...
- so the first 11 chapters of the book of Romans are highly doctrinal...and then and only then does Paul launch into this discussion of what our Christian life is supposed to look like on a daily basis...
- like many other places in Scripture, the writer begins by explaining the gospel indicatives – who we are in Christ before laying out the gospel imperatives—what we are supposed to do as a result...
- and you might say – well, what does any of that have to do with hospitality?...everything...
- one writer said it like this...

Christianity is not primarily a human, historical, or social event. It is primarily a theological event. Therefore, to view it only in human dimensions—such as trying to effect body life in the church solely on the basis of group dynamics and organizational skills, omitting the theological dimension—is to view it incorrectly, and to invite less than satisfactory results (Boa, K., & Kruidenier, W. (2000). *Vol. 6: Romans*. Holman New Testament Commentary; Holman Reference (369). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.).
- that's why we didn't just start in verse 13....there's a theological context necessary to grow in this area...
- please look back over verses 1-12 and look for principles that will help us want to show hospitality...

A. Because you have been impacted by the mercy of God.

- **Romans 12:1 - Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God...**
- that's the way Paul summarizes the first 11 chapters of this book – it's a story of God's mercy...
- and what would motivate us to show hospitality to someone else – it's because you're still amazed that God showed hospitality to you...

B. You want to present your redeemed body to Him.

- **Romans 12:1 - Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God...**
- there's no question that showing hospitality to someone else is seldom convenient or natural or easy...
- but as followers of Christ, we understand that the call to discipleship is to take up our cross and follow Him...
- that's what it means for Jesus to be our Lord...
- **Romans 10:9-10 - that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.**
- we had an interesting example of that last weekend...our pastors decided with everything happening with the Purdue property that last Sunday would be a great day to have a special time of fasting and prayer...
- and we scheduled a number of opportunities for people to go to one another's homes in the afternoon and pray together and those activities went very well...
- now you might say – how much time did you guys give to the thought that the women's retreat was also that weekend...and so some of the ladies who were involved in all of that on Sunday had just had a busy time Friday-Saturday?...
 - how much time?...at least from my perspective....none...I wasn't even aware of that, or if I was told, I forgot...
 - and I promise you, we'll try to never be insensitive to the realities of people's schedules...
 - but what was interesting to me was – nobody fussed at me about it...
 - although I realize that created a significant hardship on some people...
 - and again – we will not take that for granted...but on the other side of that...I am thankful for a group of people who in many ways understand...sometimes we sacrifice with these bodies in order to accomplish what God desires...

C. You are adopting a Biblical view of self.

- **Romans 12:3 - For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.**
- see, what prevents us many times from being hospitable?...
- a wrong view of self...
- and that can go both directions...the tendency that is called out here...
- to think too highly of ourselves...and play that out with our illustration of teenagers showing hospitality in their SS classes and youth groups...
- what prevents that from happening to the degree that it should?...what motivates clique-ishness?...
- the answer is – pride...
- why should I stoop down and befriend someone like that?...

- but you know, the other side is true as well?...
 - it's possible to have an unbiblically low view of self...
 - well, I might be rejected...I don't have anything to offer...
 - if we have those people over, we might run out of things to say or do...
 - this verse calls upon us to think soberly...to think biblically...
 - in friendships, we're not here to represent ourselves anyway....we're here to represent Christ...and if we're in Him, and He is in us...then we can seek to build friendships on a strong foundation of confidence...
- time doesn't allow us to go through each of these phrases...but do you see what verses 10-11 contribute to what we're studying?...

D. Because you want to be devoted to the right things.

- we all (and our children) are going to be devoted to something...
 - **Romans 12:10-11 - Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord;**
 1. brotherly love
 2. giving preference
 3. not apathetic
 4. with zeal
 5. out of a heart that loves to serve Christ
- now, let's put this into a series of action steps...

III. The Practice of Hospitality

A. Be sure you've allowed God to show hospitality to you.

- all of this assumes that you have Christ working in and through you...

B. Evaluate your habits in this area in the past. Thank God for what is right and ask forgiveness for what is wrong.

C. Prayerfully consider ways you can use your current activities to follow this command.

D. Start slowly.

E. Include others who have more experience in hospitality than you.

F. Ask the Lord to help you use biblical hospitality as a means to developing more a new friendship this year.