

# Worship hospitably

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, you'll find it helpful to have your Bibles open, and to begin with, perhaps Deuteronomy chapter 12, although we're going to range a little bit through the scriptures this evening. My title tonight is Worship Hospitably, or True Household Worship, if you prefer that.

I'm sure people are often asking you the same question that they're asking me at the moment, how is your church building project going? And what they mean, of course, is our renovation of the building in Buchanan Street.

And when they ask that, I'm glad to tell them that it's going really pretty well. Yes, extra costs have come up, including, I guess, about £100,000 worth of extra work, emergency repairs to these crucial beams.

Remember, we saw them all sagging, beams that were holding the tower up, and holding the doorways up, or in fact, not holding them up, which is the issue. Just waiting for a disaster to happen.

So we're very thankful, aren't we, for that extra cost of £100,000. It could have been a far greater disaster if we hadn't been doing up the building, if we hadn't been stripping it out and discovered all these things.

[ 1 : 17 ] So yes, there's been extra costs. But yes, we still have a way to go also because of that and so on in the finance. That's going to be a challenge for us over the next few years. And more of us are going to have to help shouldering that burden if we're going to meet the target.

But on the whole, there is so much to be thankful for. And I rejoice to be able to say that to people when they ask. But of course, that building project isn't the church building project that really matters, is it?

If you read my letter in the current Tron Times, you'll have seen that building the church of God, the real house of God, isn't about buildings at all, is it?

No, it's rather about what God is building his people into. Into a worshipping community, into a living temple in which God himself dwells. The church, says Paul in 1 Timothy 3.15, that's the text that's on the front of our sheets every single week.

You ought to know it by heart. The church is the household of God. That is, it's the family of God. It's the home where God chooses to dwell with his people. Listen to what Paul says in Ephesians chapter 2 about this.

[ 2 : 32 ] You are, he says to the church at Ephesus, the household of God. Built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole structure being joined together grows into a holy temple in the Lord.

In him you also are being built together into, listen, the dwelling place for God by the Spirit. Isn't that extraordinary?

But you see, that is God's ongoing building project. Building us into be a people, a temple in which he himself dwells. Now what goes on in a temple?

What goes on in a temple? Worship. Yes, of course. That's what a temple is for, isn't it? Worship. But what kind of worship does God want in his temple?

That's a question. But here's a surprise. When you read the New Testament carefully, you'll find that what God wants by way of worship in his temple is not so much singing or dancing or incense or choral music or organ recitals or anything else of that kind of religious line.

[ 3 : 57 ] No. When the New Testament speaks about worship, it's meaning much more foundational things than that. Much more foundational. Much more basic. If we stay in Ephesians, having talked about God building his church, his household into a holy temple, Paul goes on to speak about what that worship in the true temple looks like.

And in chapter 4, verse 1, he sums it up like this. Walk, he says, in a manner worthy of your calling. With all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing one another in love.

That's worship, says Paul. And the whole of the three chapters that follow, Ephesians 4 to 6, are all about worship of worthy walking.

The worship of worthy walking. There's a good little series of W's for you. The worship of worthy walking. That's the kind of worship that God wants from us. And he tells us in this chapter what it looks like in practice.

Now read those chapters. Read Ephesians 4 to 6 this week during your quiet times. You'll see that there's nothing airy-fairy at all about the worship that God requires.

[ 5 : 07 ] It's all absolutely down-to-earth reality. It's the nitty-gritty of life, isn't it? Wives, husbands, sons, daughters, people you work with, the community, and so on. Now you see, it's so important to think in the Bible's way when we're talking about what worship really means.

Because if all we think about when we're talking about worship is what we do in church services, then although that is part of our worship, we're missing out about 95% of what the Bible really means by worship.

Which is walking worthily of our calling all the time. And tonight I want to focus on one area, just one area of practical worship that the whole Bible sees as being of immense importance for God's people.

And that's the area of hospitality. And especially hospitality to strangers. And hospitality to people that you and I might not naturally gravitate towards and be drawn to to spend our time with.

And that, according to the New Testament, is an area that we simply must devote serious attention to if we are to offer to God acceptable worship.

[ 6 : 22 ] Turn back again with me to the end of Hebrews chapter 12 and start of Hebrews 13. And just look again at the verses. This is a scene of all some seriousness, isn't it? We've got the voice of God addressing us from heaven, from the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

And the climax in verse 28. Therefore, let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus, let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.

And what does that mean? Well, he goes right on, doesn't he? There's no break there. There's no chapter division in the original. Let brotherly love continue. And do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers.

You see, God wants us to take our worship very seriously, with reverence, with awe. Make sure that we're offering acceptable worship. What does that mean? Well, verse 2, showing hospitality to strangers.

One of the first things he says, isn't it? Now, that word hospitality, you must distinguish that from just entertaining friends.

[ 7 : 38 ] That's not what he means. The word there in the Greek, *phylaxenia*, comes from two words. You probably recognize them. Philo, love. That's where you get the word Philadelphia and all that.

And *xenos*, stranger. *Xenophobia*. *Phylaxenia*. The opposite of it, isn't it? Philo, *xenos*. We are to love the stranger. That's what hospitality means.

I wonder if that has ever come to your mind, to the top of your list, when you've ever thought about worship in the church. I wonder if you go down to the worship section in Wesley Owen, down the road there, and you find a section called worship, which I suspect is very, very large.

Probably mostly CDs, actually, rather than books. But I wonder if when you go to that section and look at the books, you'll find anywhere a book about Christian hospitality. I doubt it. I could be wrong. But some of you can go and check this week.

But here it is. Top of the list of what the apostle calls acceptable worship. Is real hospitality. Isn't that striking?

[ 8 : 41 ] And, of course, read on. Real worship involves solidarity with suffering believers. Verse 3. Right marriage relationships and pure sexual relationships.

Verse 4. Detached contentment. Verse 5. Honoring leaders who speak the word. See, verse 7.

There's a whole series, actually, in these verses on what real worship, acceptable worship is.

But we're not going to have a whole series tonight. I just want to focus on this matter of hospitality. Because I'm not sure that it's something that we as Christians today take nearly seriously enough.

And I'm not sure it's something, perhaps we as a congregation, take as seriously as the New Testament wants us to. Let me ask this question. Why does God want us to be hospitable people? Well, the answer is because he himself is a wonderfully and lavishly hospitable God. He is a God who loves to welcome strangers into his family.

[ 9 : 46 ] And therefore, if we are his people and his family, we also are to be a people who reflect him, who love to welcome strangers into our families. So I want to think tonight a little bit about what this means and what the implications are for our thinking.

First of all, this. A worshipping community must be a caring and a hospitable community. A worshipping community must be a caring and a hospitable community.

The Bible teaches us that integral to true worship is true and generous hospitality, especially to the stranger, especially to the needy person, the lonely person, the one who has nothing to give to us by way of return.

That's my contention. And I want to try and demonstrate that to you from the Bible and show you that it is a consistent pattern that God requires of his people right from the very beginning.

So tonight we're not doing as we normally do, expounding one passage of Scripture and staying in the same place. Sometimes it's good to just trace a theme through the Bible and see just how important something like that is.

[ 10 : 56 ] So first I want to turn to the Old Testament law in Deuteronomy and show you just how pervasive this is. Turn back again to Deuteronomy chapter 12. As I said, we've been studying this together in Cornhill and we've found the teaching in Deuteronomy to be extraordinarily practical and very, very challenging.

As I said, these early chapters, 12 and 13, are expounding what it means to worship God truly and to flee from idolatry, to worship the true God alone and to worship him in the way that he commands us to worship him.

Now notice verse 4. Notice the necessary negatives that there are in this passage. God isn't afraid of negatives. We don't like to be negative, but God says negatives are necessary.

Verse 4. You shall not worship the Lord your God in that way. That is in the way of the world around you, with all its self-centered, with all its sensuous spirituality.

No, but, verse 5, you are to worship my way. And we read all these words. And look at the end of verse 7.

[ 12 : 08 ] You shall rejoice, you and all your household. Then verse 8, another negative. You're not to do just as you please. No, that's not good enough for God.

You're to worship God his way and in his place. And notice verse 12. Notice, as I said, how it explains what verse 7 means by households. Not just your sons and daughters, but your male servants, your female servants, the Levite that is within your town, since he has no portion or inheritance with you.

Not just family, but servants and Levites. Who were the Levites? The Levites were the itinerant teachers of God's word. The special notice given to them in the law because they had no land, no inheritance, no substance of their own.

And therefore they were wholly dependent on the generosity and the hospitality of God's people for their survival. I suppose in a way just as many missionaries and church workers are today. But your household is way beyond just your own integral family.

Notice that. Turn over a page to Deuteronomy 14, verse 27, and you see the same thing. You shall not neglect the Levite who is within your towns, for he has no portion of an inheritance with you.

[ 13 : 27 ] And at the end of every three years you shall bring out all the type of your produce in the same year, lay it up within your towns, and the Levite, because he has no portion or inheritance with you, and the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow who is within your towns shall come and eat and be filled, that the Lord your God may bless you in the work of all your hands that you do.

Again, you see, it's talking about rejoicing and worshipping together in God's presence. But notice the emphasis again. Not just for yourselves, but for all of those, especially the excluded, the marginalized, and the others.

One more reference. Just turn over to chapter 24, verses 17 and 18. I could be giving you dozens of these, and if you read through Deuteronomy, you'll find them for yourselves. But again, just to see the care that God has for those who can't help themselves.

Verse 17. You shall not pervert the justice due to the sojourner or to the fatherless, or take a widow's garment in pledge, but you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and the Lord your God redeemed you from there.

Therefore I command you to do this. And again, if you read on there, you'll see about the deliberate care that God makes his people have for the fatherless and the widow.

[ 14 : 52 ] They're not to leave, they're not to go right to the edge of their fields, they're not to take every last grape off their vines, they're to leave something deliberately for the sojourner of the fatherless and the widow.

Verse 22 tells us why. Remember, you were once a slave and God rescued you. Why are they to make such a deliberate provision for such people?

Well, because God cares for them. And because God wants his people to worship him by likewise caring for them.

And not to forget either that once upon a time that was just what you were. That's why I command you to do this, says God. You see, that's just a tiny sample.

I could show you dozens more texts. We could be here all night. But that's enough, isn't it? Just to show you that God takes hospitality very seriously, doesn't he? And he demands that his people do too.

[ 15 : 53 ] And again, notice, hospitality is not the same as just entertainment. Not in the way we often think of just entertaining our friends. Often there's a quid pro quo in that, isn't there?

We get something for something. You have them round and then they'll have you round. And then on you go, up and up in the dinner party circuit. You see, that's a party that you're having so that actually in the end you will get something.

You'll gain something. Social acceptance or maybe more influence or expanding your social circle, that sort of thing. Nothing wrong in that. But actually, you're going to get something from it. But what God is talking about is throwing a party where you're not going to get anything but you're going to give something.

And you're giving often to somebody who hasn't got anything to give you in return. The sojourner, the fatherless, the widow, the misfits of society. The one who just hasn't got anything to repay the favour with.

It's not the polite dinner party crowd that he's talking about. It's actually the people who might be a little bit awkward to have in your house. Maybe the folk who are a bit socially inadequate.

[ 17 : 02 ] People that, well, it's quite an effort perhaps to handle them. Maybe they're a bit odd. But you see, our God is a truly hospitable God. And he reserves in his household a portion that he says belongs by right to those very people.

to the unwanted, to the unlovely. The unlovely in our eyes, that is, not in God's eyes. Now, if you find that a new thought, then you need to read on in the Bible to see just how serious God is about this.

If you read on in Deuteronomy to chapter 27, in the curses, you'll see that in chapter 27, verse 19, God says, Cursed be anyone, and this is of his own people, Cursed be anyone who perverts the justice due to the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow.

And when God's people did do that, he did punish them. It was precisely those kind of things that caused God to send his people out of Israel, the land, into exile. Just listen to Ezekiel, the prophet. Father and mother are treated with contempt in you. The sojourner suffers excessively extortion in your midst. The fatherless and the widow are wronged in you. You have despised my holy things, says the Lord.

[ 18 : 20 ] Therefore, I have poured out my wrath on you. Ezekiel chapter 22. You can read the same in Isaiah, in Jeremiah, in almost all the prophets.

God judged them for their lack of care, for their disregard for those in real need of a loving shelter, of a godly household. He judged them, we might say, for their lack of Christian hospitality.

Well, that's God's law in the Old Testament. Alas, it was indeed far, far too much ignored by God's people through the ages. But secondly, think now what we see in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ himself by total contrast.

the only true, the only perfect worshipper of God that ever has been. It's absolutely the opposite, isn't it? Jesus lives out all the time the concerns of God's loving laws.

Wherever he goes, think of his wonderful concern for the stranger, for the outsider, for the excluded person. Think of the woman at the well that Alistair was speaking to us about last Sunday evening in John chapter 4.

[ 19 : 33 ] Or Zacchaeus, or Levi, or countless others. Think of the lepers who no one would touch, the demon-possessed who no one would go near, the blind, the lame, who people despise and spat on.

Think of the unclean woman with the issue of blood. Again and again in the Gospels, what do we see? We see everywhere Jesus Christ eating and drinking with them in their houses and with a household all around them of just these kind of people.

None excluded. Just as Deuteronomy chapter 12 commands, isn't it? To living expression of what we just read. And what's more, what we also see in the Gospels is that as soon as God calls, Jesus calls to himself just such people, we find them copying him, don't they?

Read Matthew chapter 10 and think about Matthew telling us of his conversion. No sooner is Matthew called out of his tax booth then what do we see? He's opening his home, isn't he?

To all Jesus' people. The motley crew of followers that come around him. They're eating in his house. Just the same with Zacchaeus. Just the same with countless others that we see.

[ 20 : 50 ] And Jesus is very explicit in his teaching, isn't he? Remember the parable in Luke 10, the Good Samaritan? He's the hero of the story, isn't he? A filthy, pagan, Samaritan.

Hated by good, pious Jews. And yet he's the one, isn't he, who shows himself to be a man of true faith, a true servant of the living God by his generous and sacrificial hospitality.

You know, don't you, says Jesus, that this man really does love God with his heart and with his soul and with his strength. How do you know it? Because you can see him loving his neighbour as himself.

You can see him reflecting the love of God above. Loving even an enemy. Loving a Jew who likely would have never spoken to him, spat on him. While at the same time the pious, spouting priest and the Levite hurry past on the other side.

See, they're hurrying off to keep themselves pure, no doubt, for what they call worship. They didn't want to defile themselves with blood or with a dirty body. They wanted to be clean and nice to go to the temple.

[ 21 : 58 ] But in fact, Jesus is saying they're not worshipping at all. The worshipping one in this story is the one who gets down off his donkey, gets his sleeves rolled up, gets his hands dirty and smelly and gives of himself.

He's the one who's really offering an acceptable sacrifice to God. It's very striking, isn't it? And so, thirdly, when we turn to this issue of household worship in the apostles and what they say to the New Testament church, we shouldn't be surprised to see exactly the same prominence given to hospitality.

We've read these words in Hebrews 13. We could have just as well gone to Paul in Romans chapter 12. In fact, do just turn to Romans chapter 12 for a minute and look at verse 1, the famous verse of chapter 12.

It's so clear, isn't it, about what spiritual worship really is. I appeal to you, therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship or as the footnote says, your rational service.

our spiritual worship of God is our rational service or our rightly understood service of God in our whole life, in our body. We present our bodies as living sacrifice.

[ 23 : 27 ] You see, to God, it's not just the thought that counts. It's the act that counts with God. It's not just think about being loving people.

It's be loving people. You see, contribute. Act. Look down to verses 12 and 13 of chapter 12.

Rejoice in hope. Still talking about what your reasonable service is, your spiritual worship. Rejoice in hope. Be patient in tribulation. Be constant in prayer.

Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. You see, contribute. Actually put your hand in your pocket. Don't just think about it.

Do it. And show hospitality. And notice the context. All in the context of rejoicing in hope, being patient, even, he says, in tribulation.

[ 24 : 27 ] See this? There's no ideal time or circumstances that we're to wait for to show our worship through hospitality. It's not just when you get a better house you'll be able to do this.

Or when you've got more money you'll be able to do this. Or when you've got more time you'll be able to do this. Paul's saying, even in the midst of tribulation with joy and rejoicing this is how you're to worship God.

Peter says exactly the same thing in 1 Peter 4 verses 8 and 9. Above all, he says, keep loving one another earnestly since love covers a multitude of sins.

And he goes right on in the next verse to give a very practical way of doing just that. Keep on loving one another. Show hospitality to one another. And then he adds without grumbling.

Very realistic, isn't it? Ungrudging hospitality. That's not always easy, is it? I can tell you it's not always easy. It means that, for example, when I crash into bed on a Saturday night and I say to Rebecca, we don't have anyone coming for lunch tomorrow, do we?

[ 25 : 31 ] And she says, well there's only 12. It's just one release the word group this week. Then that means I'm not to grumble. I'm not to grudge it. The text doesn't say I've got to stand up and shout hallelujah, but it does say I'm not to grumble.

And you see, particularly so, for me, because whenever Paul lays out the qualities for a bishop or a presbyter, one who leads God's people by speaking God's word, as Hebrews 13, 7 says, alongside the one unique qualification that must be recognized by the church, having a teaching gift, he also says Paul is to be known for his hospitality.

1 Timothy 3 and 2 and Titus 1 and 8 make that absolutely clear. They're explicit. He must be hospitable. Well, of course, that's obvious, isn't it? Because ministry isn't just about sharing words with people, it's about doing so in a relationship with people.

And you can't be a Christian leader of any kind who leads anybody anywhere if you're not in a relationship with those people. It implies sharing your life in a real way.

That's, by the way, why local churches need their own pastor, not just someone to listen to online or on TV. Because you need to know that the person who's speaking to you actually cares about the people they're speaking to.

[ 26 : 58 ] Now, that doesn't mean, of course, that any pastor can have the same depth of relationship with every single person or that he can have every single person in their home all the time, unless that congregation is very small.

But it does mean that any Christian leader must be genuinely hospitable as much as they can. They try to do that. And, of course, also that they focus their attention on those who are in need of care of friendship.

The young, who are often in need of guidance. The lonely, the newcomer, the fatherless, the husbandless, and so on. And it does mean, also, that no one in whatever situation in the Christian church can expect to exert any kind of meaningful leadership unless they are hospitable.

Sometimes, you know, there are folk in churches who are very keen to be leaders, very keen to have influence in the church and they feel that they just don't have as much influence as they'd like to have.

Well, one of the reasons, perhaps, that they don't have as much influence as they'd like to have is that they aren't hospitable. Because if you are, if you and your family are people who rejoice in inviting into your homes young people, the young in faith, young married couples, young students and so on, if you care for them and help them, then what you'll find is that quite naturally these people will begin looking to you, not just for the physical things in life, not just for these things, but also for leadership and spiritual things.

[ 28 : 29 ] Well, of course. And that's the role that we're all actually called to in the church, not just leaders, although leaders have to lead by example. That's why if you look at 1 Timothy 5, for example, you find that Paul says, interestingly, that a widow, a widow should only be considered as one who qualifies for financial aid and help from the church if she herself, says Paul, has shown hospitality, has washed the feet of the saints.

That could go on and on, you see, but I hope the point's clear. A worshipping household must be a hospitable household. And the reason is because that reflects the nature of God our Father, the one who brought us near when we were separated and alienated and strangers to the promise and without hope in the world, as Paul says in Ephesians 2.

Once we were straying like lost sheep, says Peter, but now we have returned to the shepherd, the bishop of our souls. We have found lavish hospitality in the Father's house.

And so also others must find that in our house. A truly worshipping household will be a truly hospitable one. But second, a truly hospitable community will be a community of power.

People talk a lot of nonsense about the power of worship today and what they mean is the emotional power of singing and so on. And of course it is powerful. Not always good, not always helpful, but powerful.

[ 30 : 06 ] But true worship, true living sacrificial service like Paul is speaking about in our lives together is powerful. It's very powerful because it is the power of real Christ-like living.

And where a church is a truly hospitable church full of people who delight to open their homes for Christ and his kingdom, not using their homes as closed castles for their own indulgence, their own protection, then there is power at work in two ways.

First, there is evangelistic power in an open hospitable home. That might seem strange to you, but it's true. Last year, as you know, I was at Alistair Begg's conference in Parkside in Ohio, his pastor's conference.

One of his speakers was a man called Vody Baucom, who was a great, enormous black American man, the sort of guy that if he came running at you on the football field, you would scarper very fast. He must have been all of 300 pounds.

And he was a terrific speaker. And he was brilliant in question and answer. And in the question and answer session, somebody asks him, Vody, what do you think the answer is to our youth problems in churches?

[ 31 : 17 ] Do you believe, as he quoted somebody, some American who'd been writing about this, do you believe, as so-and-so says, that what we really need within the next five years is to double the number of youth pastors in our churches?

And Vody Baucom said, well, he said, if you look at a graph of the numbers of youth in our churches, as the number of youth pastors has gone this way, the number of youth in our churches has gone down this way. So he says, I don't see that there's any great value in doubling a bad trend and making things twice as bad as they were.

I thought that was a very good answer. So then they said, well, how are we to reach the alienated youth of our age? And without a moment's hesitation, he said, that's quite simple.

Invite them into ordinary Christian homes. Invite them into ordinary Christian homes. And then he told us about how he himself grew up with a single mother who was a Buddhist.

He grew up in California. Totally and utterly confused in all sorts of ways. And then he came upon the extraordinary influence on him of being confronted with a real Christian family, real Christian people, and just seeing and being part of what goes on in a real Christian household.

[ 32 : 32 ] Now that may surprise you. I guess most of us think our own family is rather dysfunctional. It's not really going to be terribly helpful for anybody to come in and be part of us. But you know, a household, warts and all, but a household where Christ is honoured and where marriage is honoured and where children are loved, and that means they're not allowed to just run right and do what they like, but they're disciplined because of love.

That is a powerful, powerful witness of the truth of the kingdom of God, especially to people who have never, ever experienced that in their own lives and their own families.

And many of the young students and the young adults that come among us here in the city centre of Glasgow have come from backgrounds where they've never experienced anything of the redeeming and the redemptive power of a true Christian household.

Don't underestimate the evangelistic power of a genuine Christian home, warts and all. Secondly, though, there is nurturing power in a hospitable home, especially for the young, especially for the lonely, especially for the new Christian, the one who's finding their way.

Even those who come from good Christian homes but are young and are away from home benefit immensely from being taken into another Christian home. And the household that's open to the stranger and the visitor and the young student is where so much basic Christianity is taught and learned and witnessed.

[ 34 : 08 ] Read about that in Titus chapter 2. It's all about how older men teach younger men. It's how older women train younger women. It's all how people learn from one another in the most natural, the most domestic of circumstances inside our homes.

Where else are young Christians going to learn what a good marriage looks like in the everyday things, in the ordinary things of life, if they don't see it in our homes?

Where are they going to find out how you handle children in a godly way unless they experience it from older ones? How are they going to experience what it is to have guests and how to show

hospitality unless they learn in our homes?

I can testify personally what a profound effect that kind of ministry had on my life in my student days and beyond.

I've said to you before how when under William Still's ministry in Aberdeen, I think when I was a student over five years at medical school, probably I had Sunday lunch on my own twice in five years.

[ 35 : 12 ] We were hardly ever on our own. Family after family, week after week, some of them older, some of them very old, some of them younger. My best friends in my student days were all one or two generations sometimes older than I was.

Some of those in particular had a huge, huge influence on me. One couple in particular who took us very much under their wing. After lunch on a Sunday, she would often say to whoever was in the firing line that week, come and help me with the dishes in the kitchen.

Over the dishes in the kitchen, there would follow something akin to the Inquisition and we would receive encouragement and rebukes. In my case, very often rebukes and richly deserved or whatever it was.

And these were formative things in our lives, shaping and changing our lives. But it was one day in that very house that the man in question took me aside and said, if you don't get off your backside and marry that girl, I'm going to take her myself as a second wife.

And at last, I woke up to reality and, well, my life wouldn't be the same without those people.

[ 36 : 23 ] And by the way, that's why I've never been fearful since, to give the same advice to others and give them a good kick in the pants. So men, watch out. But, honestly and truly, my life and the life of many, many other young ones, friends of mine, were nurtured and helped to grow just by the power of real Christian hospitality.

And in that church, there were many fewer homes than there are in this church. It was a smaller congregation and there were many more students than we have in our church. But there was a determined commitment to worship through hospitality.

But a truly hospitable church will be a powerful church. But listen, it just doesn't happen by accident. It's a determination that's required. And that brings me to the third thing, the final thing. A powerfully hospitable community can only be that if it really is a servant community.

Paul says to the church in Corinth, doesn't he, that he is a servant of Christ for their sake. And he goes on to teach them that that's to be their outlook on life. They also are saved to serve.

[ 37 : 40 ] The love of Christ, he says, controls us. And he died for all that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sakes died and was raised.

2 Corinthians 5, 15. No longer live for themselves but for him. And life is busy today.

Of course it is. There's hardly enough time for the essentials never mind the additional burdens of life. And certainly being hospitable takes time and effort, doesn't it? Especially at weekends when we want to have a break, a bit of breathing space, a bit of time to ourselves.

And believe me, I can tell you what it's like to want a bit of time to yourself at weekends too. And that's natural, isn't it? But you see, what Paul is saying to us is that the gospel has rescued us from the merely natural, hasn't it?

no longer to live for themselves but for him. Him who what? Him who died for their sake.

[ 38 : 46 ] And for most of us, weekends are the time when we do have time to be hospitable. Most of us only work five days a week, not seven days a week, twelve hours a day as Paul's readers worked. And weekends are a great time for real worship, real hospitality.

hospitality. I know that some of us are very committed to that ministry of hospitality but there's always more that we can do and as a church I do wish that we were more committed to that particular ministry and worship.

I have to confess sometimes I have been a bit embarrassed when I've talked to some of our students, some of our young singles and said, I hope you're getting to know some of the families and older folk in the church.

And they said, well, not really. You see, it's very hard for them to do that unless we're inviting them into our homes, isn't it? If you're an older person saying, well, the young folk in the church don't get to know us.

Most of them don't have a home to invite you into. Some of them do and some of them are very good at it. But after all, the burden must fall, mustn't it, on those of us who are older, who have been

here for years, who've got homes, who are established in the congregation.

[ 39 : 58 ] Listen again. Just listen carefully to what God's commands are about how he wants us to worship him. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.

Romans 12. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers. Hebrews 13. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling.

1 Peter 4. Let me ask you, are we all a worshipping household like that? In those very real and practical ways.

And if so, are we really regular worshippers or are we just occasional? It's hard, isn't it, at times? So if we're going to be that kind of people, we've got to be determined.

And we've got to face up, haven't we, to the kind of things that would prevent us. Let me mention just a few of those. We're too tired. Well, sometimes that's true, isn't it? And you need a break.

Sometimes through the year you just have to take a few free Sundays.

[ 41 : 03 ] After we'd had all the Release the Word groups through on Sundays through the winter, we just needed a break of a week or two. I couldn't cope anymore. But you know, you'll always be justified, won't you, in feeling too tired.

Unless you're determined to plan your weekends so that you're able to show hospitality for God's people. As I was saying, in Aberdeen, there were people there who ordered their whole Saturday just so that they could be able to have Sunday free to provide hospitality for.

And in that church they were all meeting on a Saturday night for the prayer meeting as well. So everything had to be prepared before then. But honestly, I think if I can manage it on a Sunday most of the time, then I think probably we all can.

If it's a new thing to you, just start gently. What about just setting aside on your calendar one Sunday a month to open your home and to feed others? I'm sure you can manage that. Second excuse we might often feel, I'm not good enough.

I'm not a good enough cook, maybe. I don't have a good enough home. But that's just pride, isn't it? Our home doesn't need to be fancy. In fact, people feel far, far more at home if our home isn't too fancy.

[ 42 : 15 ] And your food doesn't have to be fancy. It just has to be filling, especially if you're feeding students. Or every single group that came to us for release the word just got chilli every week. It was a little bit different every week, depending on which dog food was going cheap at Tesco.

No, I'm only joking. I'm only joking. I'll never eat my chilli again. But there was just plenty of it. It was better than a black pudding supper or whatever it was going to be they would have at home.

And there's something good actually about when we open our homes not having special fancy food. We're not trying to impress people, are we? We're trying to make them feel that they're at home in our homes. We're trying to make them feel they're part of our family.

You see, if old clothes and porridge is good enough for you, then, well, you're part of the family, aren't you? Maybe you say, well, look, I'm too shy. I'm really worried about keeping conversation going.

I'm worried about a disaster if I invite people for lunch. Well, look, we've had disasters and the funny thing is even disasters aren't disasters because you laugh about them for ages afterwards. But it's actually quite easy to get around that.

[ 43 : 18 ] Just invite somebody who'll keep the conversation going. I can give you a list of at least a dozen people who'll keep it going all afternoon. So that's not an excuse. Maybe I don't know enough people to actually ask.

Well, that's easy too. You just find one person that you do know or a couple of students that you do know and then say to them, you come for lunch and bring some of your friends. I do that all the time. And it's a great way of getting to know new people and it's a great way of keeping the conversation going because they all know each other and then it's a lot easier.

So say, it brings some of your Release the Word group or your Tron Youth group or whatever it is. Maybe you say, look, our stage in life is very difficult. We've got young kids and it's very hard.

Well, it is hard when you've got young kids. I know that. I can talk with experience. But listen, I can tell you this. It is a huge, huge benefit to your children to grow up with an open home in all sorts of ways.

They get to be used to having all kinds of adults of all ages around their house and getting easy around them. They see the value of real fellowship and Christian relationships in action.

[ 44 : 31 ] They think Sundays are great days, days of great excitement, things to look forward to because they're part of it. I grew up, as you know, in a Christian home, in a church home, in a manse.

And our Sundays were always like that. I don't remember a Sunday hardly when we didn't have people, just the odd one. But as a teenager growing up in our home, having students week by week for Sunday lunch was just a great thrill for me.

It was a privilege to know these folk who were just that little bit older and to have them take interest in me. I remember one time when a bunch of the students that we often had on a Sunday night came around and they were all going sledging and they asked if I wanted to come.

I just thought that was great when I was 14 or 15. And actually, anyway, your kids would far rather spend Sunday with strangers than with their parents because we're generally far too boring for them.

All I can say is that throughout my life, I've always found that opening your home for the Lord's sake, opening your home in order to give, not to receive, actually results in you receiving far, far more than you've ever given.

[ 45 : 33 ] Far more. Always. I could say much more but I'm closing with this. What is our motivation for this kind of determined worship through hospitality?

Sharing our homes and our lives with God's people. Well, yes, there is power in such a way. Power to draw people to Jesus. Power to help people grow in Jesus.

And that's a real motivation. And, Paul says, we owe it to the Lord Jesus Christ, don't we? He died for us that we might no longer live for ourselves but for Him. But, you know, above all, above all, to practice hospitality like this for God's people, for those also who are becoming God's people, is a wonderful, wonderful way for us to show our love for the Lord Jesus Himself.

Remember what Jesus says in Matthew chapter 10? whoever gives to any of these little ones even a cup of cold water because He's my disciple. Well, He's doing it for me, says Jesus.

Whoever receives you receives me. See, in pouring out love and kindness to Christ's little ones, you're showing your love to Jesus.

[ 46 : 50 ] Just like the woman in Matthew 26 who poured the beautiful, expensive perfume all over her Lord and Savior. we're doing it for Him. Let's listen to Jesus' words.

For I was hungry and you gave me food. I was thirsty and you gave me drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me. I was naked and you clothed me. I was sick and you visited me.

I was in prison and you came to me. Then the righteous will answer Him saying, Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you or naked and clothe you?

When did we see you sick or in prison and visit you? And the King will answer them and say, Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.

You did it to me. Don't neglect to show hospitality to strangers for thereby some have entertained angels unawares, says the Apostle.

[ 48 : 03 ] But Jesus says, it's not just angels, it's me. Wouldn't it be wonderful if the congregation of St. George's Tron were renowned in the heavenly realms among the angels as being a place where angels on a visit can be sure of warm hospitality in our homes.

Wouldn't that be wonderful? And where Jesus himself is lovingly welcomed like that in every single home. Well, if that's going to be so in heaven, then it's got to be so right here on earth in Glasgow, hasn't it?

Let us offer to God acceptable worship with reverence and awe. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers.

Well, let's pray, shall we? Heavenly Father, we thank you for your wonderful welcome to us, for the open door of your house and home, and for the love that you've lavished upon us.

help us, we pray, to be a people who are known for the lavishness of our love and our welcome, that in our own homes with all their faults and all their failings, but where we love you, the Lord Jesus Christ, in our own homes, people will be drawn to Jesus and grow in Jesus and praise Jesus.

[ 49 : 40 ] to help us, Lord, to worship you that way. Amen.