

Equipping the Church to the Ministry of Edification and Hospitality at God's House and Yours (Ephesians 4:12-13)

It was this time of year 14 years ago that our lives began to change because of the truths we'll study today. Jaime and I were a young newlywed couple, 22-year-olds deeply in love with each other, but we didn't have a clue about a lot of things (or at least I didn't). We were at a very big church mainly to be under the ministry of one of the great expository preachers of our time, Pastor John MacArthur. We had been attending less than a year, and it was still hard for us as new people to try and connect, get to know people. We didn't want to just show up for the big service, and stand up during the singing, sit up during the message, and then promptly get up and out of there when it's done and keep our privacy walls up. That can happen in a smaller church, too, like GCBC, but if you do that, you're missing a big point of church and pastors/teachers in Eph 4.

Eph 4:11-12, which we'll be studying again today, says Pastor-Teachers (that's how it can be translated grammatically and that's a title I prefer, not Senior Pastor), Shepherds/Pastor-Teachers are given by God to the church to equip the church to serve each other, and to build each other up towards unity, so that we would come to know Christ more as we mature and grow, to edify each other in the way we speak to each other after the church service and outside the church walls as well. That's biblical hospitality and fellowship.

Eph 4:12 says pastor-teachers are *"for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up [NKJV "edifying"] of the body of Christ; ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ."*

My wife and I still had a lot maturing to do under a Pastor-Teacher but we understood it was not up to him, it was up to *us* to be doing what v. 12 said in order to get to v. 13 and to mature in our faith. We were being equipped by teaching in v. 11 *so that we would be doing the work of service in v. 12 so we would in v. 13 know Jesus more and be united more to His people and growing more like Him*

There were a lot of things we didn't know yet but one thing we did know was that coming to church is not a religious duty to get over with and get out of there. It should be a relationship greenhouse, in other words, a place where relationships can grow when you plant yourself next to others who are growing, not just for 1 hour 1 week

For many Sundays, hardly anybody noticed this new couple, and some Sundays nobody said hi to us. But we didn't pout: "Nobody likes me, no one cares for me, I think I'll go eat worms." We went out of our way to talk to others, we started coming to the evening service for more fellowship, we visited different Sunday School classes; some we didn't fit in or feel as welcome, but we kept at it. We started visiting a weeknight home Bible study of a family that opened up their home each week, and that was the key for us. We met some wonderful couples at that study who we are still friends with to this day, several of them we've hosted in our home up here.

Their hospitality, their edifying serving to us, changed our lives literally, and that sort of ministry can change yours if it hasn't yet. By God's grace we want to impact others like that and you to. It was 14 years ago, I don't remember exactly how many months we had been at GCC, but for the first time another couple invited us strangers to their home for a meal. I still remember Josie and Gabe and their little baby Andrew, their humble little place (900 sq ft?), and how blessed we were by their edifying hospitality and food.

It was about a year ago, that we had Josie and Gabe in our home here (they moved to Fair Oaks years ago). These dear friends of ours who opened their home to us years ago in SoCal and have up here, we had them to our home to talk about opening up their home to 2 orphans from Congo. They joined us in our adoption journey and they now live in Fair Oaks (Andrew now in GBC H.S. group)! Some of you met them in November when Didier was here or in a PM service or on our blog where I shared more of that whole story.

[and I and Josie and Gabe experienced Didier's hospitality in Congo]

Lives can literally be changed, when people seek to apply this text at God's house and at their house. Jaime and I have experienced it and seen many other couples like us changed on both sides of this type of ministry (edification and hospitality), and not just couples. We showed hospitality to a single guy down at GCC, welcomed him to our home many times like family, and later on he became a part of our family after he met my sister Lisa and married her! You never know how your life might be changed by hospitality! I got to disciple and counsel Ethan as he courted my sister. Jolee (Jaime's sister) received hospitality from families and married into one, too! Didier shared Sunday PM how a U.S. missionary who took him in changed his life (and that's why he wants to take in kids without parents). Didier shared how another family who showed hospitality to him also changed his life when he married their daughter Annie!

Now if you're not married, I can't guarantee you that you'll get married through this sort of ministry, but I can tell you that serving others at God's house and through your house can be life-changing ... and I pray that it will be for every believer in God's house here.

Outline:

1. **The Power of this Ministry: God and His Love**
2. **The Purpose of this Ministry: Serving and Edification**
3. **A Platform for this Ministry: Hospitality at God's House and Your House**

First, the power of this ministry is God and His love. In context, the *practical applications* of Ephesians 4ff build on the *doctrinal foundations* of chapters 1-3, which are all about God and His love. Our belief in that drives our behavior, that doctrine drives our duty, as Paul says in Corinthians, it's the love of Christ that compels us. The commands of Eph 4-6 must be driven by love not by legalism.

The power for what Paul calls us to do is not guilt-trips for where we don't serve or aren't hospitable or what we don't do; the greater power source is found in God's love, and what *He has done for us*. 4:1 says *walk worthy of the calling with which you've been called*.

How were we called? Ephesians 1:5: "***In love He predestined us to adoption as sons...***" It was His love that called us into His family, and we are to walk worthy of that. Why would I want to welcome someone into my home or family? Whenever I'm asked why we wanted to adopt, whether by my neighbor or by the gal cutting my hair, by a Christian or a non-Christian, when I was on the radio in December, when I was in a government office in Africa in Sept., or on a plane in October, I love to answer that question: God adopted me to His family in His love, the gospel moves me to do the same.

I was infinitely more different than God and was not seeking God, as Rom. 3:11 says no one does. I was a slave to sin, but He came to the slave market to seek me and to redeem me and free me, that's what *redemption* in Eph 1:7 is. By nature I was not God's child. I was not a son of God. I was, as the end of Eph 2:2 says, a *son of disobedience*, or end of 2:3 "*by nature a child of wrath, even as the rest. But God being rich in mercy because of His great love...*"

- It goes on to say, I was dead, but He made me alive (v. 5)!
- I was once His enemy, now I'm seated at His table (v. 6)!
- I was a slave, now I'm seated/treated as a son of the King!

- I had no resources but v. 7 says He gives me His riches!
- I could do nothing to be saved, it's by grace I'm saved, v.8!
- It's all a gift, even faith, v. 9, and I'm a new creation, v. 10!
- Once we were excluded, 12, now we're included in Christ!

¹³ *But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. [i.e., trusting His sacrifice]...*

¹⁹ *So then you are **no longer strangers and aliens** [foreigners], but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and **are of God's household***

That word "stranger" is part of the Greek word for hospitality. It's *phila* (love) + *zenos* (stranger), so literally hospitality is "showing love to strangers." It's not just having buddies or BFF over to your household; the focus of this word is love to *strangers*. It's a special attention and affection you show to strangers or those you don't know as well here at church, and that can take place in God's house before or after a church service and it should. Why would we want to do that, when it's more comfortable to hang out with and talk to those we know and who are like us? Because *God left the comforts of heaven to seek us out!* Why should we seek out and speak to strangers, especially at church to show love to them? Because *God did that to us when we were strangers*, that's why! Why invite them into our house? Because *God did that for us!*

If we're not thinking in gospel terms, we can have all kinds of excuses as to why we're too busy or have a lot going on – but we must remember God had a lot going on when He did this for us, and the love of Christ must compel us, not law; gospel, not guilt.

[We do this for biological family – Eph. 1-2 broadens our family]

Matteus was once a stranger/foreigner like v.19, an alien to the US, but he no longer is. He is a *fellow citizen* of the U.S. with me, and he is *of my household*. He's gone from foreigner to family and from stranger to citizen to son, fellow heir with his brother (3:6). I was asked this week if it's a challenge to love him as much as my natural-born children, and the honest answer is no. In fact I have to work to make sure I love my biological children as much as him.

Paul says in Eph 3:6 the gospel puts us all on equal footing, and in 3:15 the whole family of God derives its identity from our Father. Paul prays that together with all God's children, Eph 3:19, that we *know **the love of Christ** which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.* ²⁰ *Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to **the power that works within us** ... [that's the power source, #1]*

#2: The Purpose of this Ministry: Serving and Edification

Ephesians 4:12 gives the purpose statement of what the saints are to be equipped to do: "... *equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up* [NKJV "edifying"] *of the body of Christ*

The word "service" in v. 12 can also be translated "ministry." But as I shared last week, ministry just means *service* in the original language. In fact, this same word is used in Luke 10 for Martha in her home, serving the Lord by hospitality, preparing Him a meal. The verb form is used of Martha serving around her table in Jn 12. The root word in Greek culture was used especially of someone who served others at tables as a gracious hospitable host. Peter's mother-in-law did this for her guest when she was healed. It wasn't just used of women, but in Acts 6 was what men did for widows. It could be serving at a table in hospitality, or any service in general.

In Acts 11:29, it's translated "the *relief* of the brethren" (in context of providing for their practical needs). How do you spell relief? Not R-O-L-A-I-D-S, one way Scripture spells it is S-E-R-V-I-C-E. This service is especially Scripture uses the same word in 2 Corinthians translated "support." It's often used for ministry outside Sunday, ex: in your household, like 1 Cor. 16:15 where Paul says "the household of Stephanus ... devoted themselves to the *service of the saints*" (same words here). Paul uses those words in Eph 4:12 to say all saints are to devote themselves to the ministry of the service of each other, and that word is not just for God's house on Sunday morning, but also your household can be, should be, a platform for your service ministry. The household of Stephanus was lit. *addicted* to serving/hospitality

In Matt. 25:44 Jesus uses this same word *service* (the verb form) to summarize things like giving someone a drink, giving them food to eat, visiting, seeing a stranger and inviting him into your home. It is those who don't do those things that show they don't love Jesus and who go to eternal punishment 2 verses later, and the flip-side is those who truly love the Lord love Him by doing those things, not to earn God's love but as an expression of His love inside us. It doesn't mean we serve *to get saved* ... but God saves us *to serve*.

We're not saved to sit in a church service and go home. God saves us to be *doing service* to those in our church, including from our home, and part of that in v. 12 it says is to *edify* others in the body.

A main way we edify each other is by how we talk to each other.
4:29 *Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for **edification** [same word] according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear*

Paul says in Romans we're to actively diligently '*pursue the things that make for...edification*' and '*pursue hospitality*' (14:19, 12:13). As we pursue showing love to strangers (what that word means), the purpose is to edify and to encourage them, to build them up. If we don't have in our mind point #1 (power is God and His love to us and in us) and point #2 (purpose is to serve to edify others) then to jump to point #3 would be a great mistake for me as a pastor to just give you practical ways to be more hospitable. Because as long as the focus is on us, and our schedule, house not being all I'd like it to be, I don't have that gift (though NT doesn't call hospitality a gift), I don't have that personality, I need some "me time," I don't have much time ... but we can spend a lot of time making excuses.

If it's up to our thoughts, some of you will just cross your arms and tune me out but if you will turn your thoughts to the cross of Jesus and His arms open wide for strangers and sinners, and His help offered to you despite your self-focusing and excuse-making, and ask Him to change your heart to love others like He loved and pray for opportunities to serve others and to build them up ... He will!

Ephesians 5:1–2 *Therefore **be imitators of God**, as beloved children;² and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God ...*

It does take sacrifice to give of our time, give of our home, give of our privacy, for the purpose of loving, serving, edifying others. But that's exactly what the gospel is all about, and Eph. 4-6 repeatedly keeps going back to that gospel foundation before our application.

The gospel empowers us to serve and do our part so the body is built up. It can't happen with a quick "hi and bye" on Sunday. We need to be in other settings, whether around a table at Starbucks or at some public place or in the privacy of a home at times to best fulfill Eph 4:15: *speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ,¹⁶ from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper **working of each individual part**, causes the growth of the body **for the building up of itself in love.***

1. The Power of this Ministry: God and His Love
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3. **A Platform for this Ministry: Hospitality at God's House and Your House**

There are many ways to serve and edify, but “a platform for this ministry is hospitality.” Please don’t think Martha Stewart Living, or elaborate tea parties, or 7-course meals with fancy foods that are hard for us guys to pronounce. GCBC is doing a spaghetti dinner tonight for everybody after Cliff’s message on fellowship ... not to impress you but to hopefully initiate fellowship, edification. Think of hospitality as inviting someone you don’t know to the table with you tonight. You don’t have to wait till tonight; it can be showing care to someone after this service as you talk to them, or next week inviting someone you don’t know who comes alone to sit by you.

If you can’t be hospitable in your house (maybe due to your living situation or life situation, you’re married to an unbeliever husband who doesn’t want you to have Christians over, or you work nights, or you’re a single person renting a room and don’t have a place of your own, etc.) you can still be a hospitable person in God’s house, at church. It’s not just opening your home; this word “hospitality” includes opening your heart and arms to new people, lonely people

It’s showing love to strangers, not showing off your super cooking. It can be having new people over *after dinner* or after the evening service for dessert with store-bought ice cream. Or on Saturday so mom doesn’t have to cook, dad can grill burgers, dogs, whatever. Don’t think of entertaining guests or impressing guests; that’s not what *hospitality* means and that can build yourself up not them. It’s often pride that prevents us from being hospitable or that keeps us from truly edifying our guests by humble others-centered service. Hospitality can be shown at your house *and also at God’s house*.

- Remember Anna, Luke 2, never left temple, always serving
- Widows in Bible times didn’t have great houses and tended to be poor, needing support by the church, but 1 Timothy 5 says these widows it supports had “*a reputation for good works ... hospitality to strangers ... assisting needy*” (v. 10)
- Jesus was so poor He didn’t even have a house or a place to lay His head at night, but He was hospitable and He served
- You don’t have to have a house to be hospitable. Abraham was hospitable *in his tent* (and you can be hospitable when you’re in a tent at family camp, invite ‘em over for smores)

Listen to what the travelling tent-makers Priscilla and Aquila did in Ephesus at this very church Paul is writing Ephesians to, for an example of outside church services, how home can be a platform for building others up, for unity, to know Christ more (Eph 4:13).

Acts 18:2 (NIV84) says Paul “... *went to see them,*³ *and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them.* [Later in the chapter Apollos came to Ephesus, teaching of Christ, v. 26]: *When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately.*

There is something about taking someone aside, outside of the corporate gatherings, when you're sitting beside them at a table, sharing time and sharing life, and sharing food at times, that can be a great platform for edifying conversations, and as v. 13 says, for building up unity as we know Christ more and mature in Christ. It was around a table that Christ taught His disciples important truths.

- At the table of a wee little man Zacchaeus, Jesus taught “*the Son of Man came to seek and save the lost*” (Luke 19)
- At the table of Levi, another converted tax collector, as He had fellowship with sinners (hospitality=intimate thing) He told the Pharisees in Lk 5 “*It is not those who are well who need a physician but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous[self-righteous] but sinners to repentance*”
- You could read later his upper room teachings (John 13-17)

The home is a great platform to learn more of Christ, as v. 13 says, beyond public larger gatherings, private more intimate interaction.

- Paul said of the same church in Ephesus that Ephesians was for: “*I taught you publicly and from house to house ...*” (Acts 20:20).
- Acts 5:42: *And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching ...* [didn't stop at Sunday AM service]
- Acts 2:42: *They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread ...*
⁴⁶ *Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart ...*

Other examples of hospitality in the early church include the home Saul was staying at when Ananias met him right after he was saved (Acts 9), a great moment in the history of the early church. In Acts 10, Simon the tanner is hosting Peter and a Gentile man Cornelius invites Peter to his home, another big moment in church history.

In Acts 16, Lydia gets saved and immediately invites Paul and his company to her home, and it says “she persuaded us” (persuasive in her pursuit of hospitality, convinced them to stay and visit with). Later in that chapter, the jailer asks “What must I do to be saved?”

³¹ *They said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you **and your household.**”* ³² *And they spoke the word of the Lord to him **together with all who were in his house.*** ³³ *And he took them that very hour of the night and **washed their wounds** [a hospitable host cares for the needs of his guests] ...* ³⁴ *And he brought them **into his house and set food before them,** and rejoiced greatly, having believed in God with his whole household.*

As you read Acts and see the brand-new Christians, nothing seems more normal than to show hospitality. If this is not part of our Christianity and life, we’re not normal. It’s been a part of God’s people since the beginning. Job 31:32 “my door was always open to the traveler.” Abraham is seen showing hospitality to 3 strangers in Genesis 18, Lot in the next chapter, and along with Gideon and Manoah, and others in hospitality, they entertained angels unaware (Heb. 13:2). Great moments in redemptive history take place on the platform of hospitality: the salvation of Rahab as she hosts the Hebrew spies, the widow of Zarephath who hosts Elijah and has her son raised. The Son of God give her honorable mention in Lk 4

The Lord’s wisdom itself is personified in Proverbs 9 as preparing food, fixing a table, and then inviting us to come and eat. The Lord Himself is the Shepherd who prepares a table for us in Psalm 23! The Lord Himself served His disciples and will serve us some day! Our service in hospitality pictures the gospel and points to Christ.

Christ-centered service ministry in hospitality is all about Christ. In Matthew 25, Christ as King says on judgment day “...*you gave Me something to eat ... you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in ... you came to Me.*’... ‘*Lord, when did we ... feed You ... and give You something to drink? And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in ... and come to You?*’ “*The King will answer and say to them, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.’* [That’s the Christ-centered focus we need as we move to applying this to the brothers of the King]

Men, we need to lead the way, here, not think of this as women’s stuff. Hospitality is a requirement of men who lead the church.

There are men who have been nominated by you for Elders that we are considering and going to be working with this year, and one requirement in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 is not just a heart to teach but a heart to serve and seek out strangers they don't know as well at church and show love to them (i.e., hospitality) as a life pattern in God's house and in their house, the things of Ephesians 4:12-13. We men need to serve our wives and support them so that this is not a burden to them to extend hospitality, and involve our kids – what a great thing it is to have our kids involved in the hospitality!

Now turn over to 1 Peter 4 and I want you to see God doesn't just call certain people in the church to serve in this way, it's for us all, young and old, male or female, church leader or not, all Christians. And there are all kinds of ways to serve, but the same word *service* or *ministry* from Eph. 4:12 has hospitality as one way to apply this, and just like our outline, 1 Peter 4 roots our service in God's power

1 Peter 4:11b: ... *whoever serves is to do so as one who is **servicing by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory ...***

The ultimate power and purpose is Christ-focused, God-glorifying, when v. 9 says: *Be hospitable to one another without complaint.* This is a command to serve in hospitality, to serve with gladness not grudgingly, not grumbling about one another, and not to let our hospitality conversations be unedifying about others. Peter says *without complaint* as a warning; complaints can happen the closer we get to people. There is this danger in showing love to strangers. And don't complain if you're not being invited to other people's homes; have them over to yours without expecting a return to you.

Jesus said '*When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you.*' (Lk 14:12-14 ESV)

I was blessed last week around a table to see a brother in Christ serving another brother in Christ who is blind, love to a stranger who couldn't see him by getting him coffee. It's a blessing for our kids to have someone in a wheelchair over to our house for a meal, or to share a meal with a mentally-handicapped person, someone who struggles to get around physically, some who need more help.

It's not that you can never have people over who are friends or neighbors but we need to be careful not to fellowship with only certain people or for what we can get out of it and neglect the NT commands to show loving hospitality to the more needy among us. In the OT in the context of what Jesus called the greatest command to man ("Love others as yourself") it's especially love of strangers:

Lev 19:34 (NKJV) *The stranger who dwells among you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.*

Deut. 10:18 says God Himself provides "*for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food ...* ¹⁹ **Therefore love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.**

Deut 14:29 "*the stranger and the fatherless and the widow who are within your gates, may come and eat and be satisfied, that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hand ...*"

Deut. 16:14: *you shall rejoice in your feast, you and your son and your daughter ... the stranger and the fatherless and the widow ...*

Psalm 68:6 says God sets the solitary ones, the lonely in families. And one way he does that is through hospitality, love to strangers, hospitality to the single mom, widow, kids who are fatherless, spiritually or otherwise, or those alone in their home, over to yours.

We've seen the power of this ministry, its purpose, and a platform (hospitality) now 3 applications of this last point also starting w/ P:

1. Plan
2. Pray
3. Pursue

1st Application: PLAN

- Much of our failure in obeying God's commands is because we don't plan. If our life is such that we're not obeying v.9, then we need to restructure, not excuse disobedience. Most of us here plan in order to give financially to the church, structuring our life and resources, and consciously plan our lives around Sunday so we can be at church. But actually the NT has more commands to practice hospitality than to go to church on Sunday or give to the church and it doesn't command other things we busy ourselves with each week.

- Plan right now as you sit here to talk to a stranger here at church when the service is over, someone you don't know
- Some may plan to invite people over after church service
- Start small ... plan to invite someone you don't know over once a month or if that's too radical, every other month
- If you are interested in doing that sort of ministry regularly and want to be in touch with other ladies pursuing this, you can sign up at the info table or talk to my wife or Becky or if you want to do it informally on your own, that's fine, too

2nd Application: PRAY

Look at what Peter says a couple verses before the command, v. 7:

⁷ *The end of all things is near; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer. [specifically pray for love]*

⁸ *Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. ⁹ Be hospitable to one another ...*

- Pray for a right heart and forgiveness for your complaining
- Pray for more of God's heart of love for strangers
- Pray for God to open your eyes to people to be hospitable to at God's house on Sunday and/or some to invite to yours

Turn to Rom. 12 and listen as you do to another cross-reference: Hebrews 13:1 *Let love of the brethren continue. ² Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers...* [and he adds in v. 18] *Pray for us...*

Don't neglect means failing because we're forgetting, overlooking. It's love of the brethren that helps us remember and recall this duty

Application #3. PURSUE

Romans 12:10 *Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; ¹¹ not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; [Christ-centered] ¹² rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, ¹³ contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality.*