

More Like Christ

EXPLORING CHRISTIAN FAITH PRACTICES

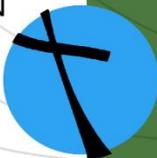
September | Welcoming



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GEORGETOWN
CHRISTIAN
REFORMED
CHURCH



Series Introduction – More Like Christ

Adapted from *Way to Live* by Bass and Richter

"Wrestling with questions about how to live your life is part of being human. Where are you heading, and why, and with whom? In today's world we all find ourselves overwhelmed with information but often moving too fast to seek wisdom. ... As members of a growing, mobile, and religiously diverse global population, we are denied easy certainty. Amid widespread social and cultural change, we are given both the freedom and the burden of choice in many areas of life." - Dorothy C. Bass

Ms. Bass frames our situation so well; we have more knowledge and more choices than ever. But in a world and society that can be disorienting, how are we to live?

Through our 2021-2022 theme we invite you to live **More Like Christ**. We remember together Jesus' proclamation that he came into the world that we may have life and have it abundantly (John 10:10).

Throughout the year we will be exploring faith practices that echo the heart of Jesus. Practices that Christ taught and modeled. While some worldviews enact rules, restrictions, and legalism, Christians discover that it is in *relationship with Jesus* we understand most fully what it means to live well.



This theme invites you into a community of people who don't just go with the flow. This community's image of "the good life" is not about having lots of stuff or being more successful than other people. Instead, it's about getting involved in the loving, challenging life of God.

This community first gathered around a person who embodied the loving, challenging life of God. When Jesus healed the sick, invited himself to dinner at the house of an unpopular man, and taught those who followed him not to set their hearts on material things, his followers could see what God really intended for this world. Jesus taught his followers to pray; he washed their feet; and he told them to love one another. A way to live started to come into focus. When Jesus was executed, this way seemed to be crushed and powerless. But when he rose from the dead, his followers soon realized that the world was changed forever, and so were their own lives. Trying to live as they had seen Jesus live no longer seemed beyond reach.

This community still exists today. Its members speak many languages and worship in many styles. Although they belong to what appear to be many separate communities - Catholic, Presbyterian, Evangelical, Lutheran, Methodist, and many more - at the heart of all these communities is Jesus. He promised always to be with them, and they experience his presence in many ways - in the faces of people in need, in the bread they share, in the music they sing, and even in the suffering they sometimes have to endure, just as he did. Sharing life with Jesus, they are caught up into the loving, challenging life of God.

So what are the characteristics of these faith practices? Each Christian practice we will look at this year...

INVOLVES US IN GOD'S ACTIVITIES IN THE WORLD AND REFLECTS GOD'S GRACE AND LOVE.

Teresa of Avila put it this way: "Yours are the feet with which Christ is to go about doing good. Yours are the hands with which Christ is to bless all people now."

IS DONE TOGETHER—NOT ALONE BUT WITH OTHERS.

The folks with whom we practice include people we know personally, brothers and sisters around the world, and many people who have come before us or who will come after us. Even when someone is participating in a practice alone, he or she is embraced by this community, which has Jesus at its heart.

IS LEARNED WITH AND FROM OTHER PEOPLE.

We have been invited into Christian practices by Jesus. Almost always, however, other people have helped us to hear Jesus' invitation and to learn the moves that make it possible to respond. Someone— family, church, mentor, friend—has shared Christ's love with us by making a specific practice a living reality: for example by welcoming us, by teaching us to make music, or by offering us forgiveness. As we take up our own parts in these practices, we will in turn invite others to join in too.

COMES TO US FROM THE PAST AND WILL BE SHAPED BY US FOR THE FUTURE.

Our challenge and privilege is to join in each practice where we are. Often it is not completely clear how to do this, however. So, we reflect, drawing on the wisdom of the past (including scripture and history) and being creative as we put the practice into play in our own situation, mindful that what we do will have an influence on generations to come.

ADDRESSES FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN NEEDS.

Each practice addresses one or more needs that are basic to who we are as human beings created in God's image and offered new life in Christ. When thinking about a practice, it is often helpful to reflect on what really basic part of our humanness is at stake in this practice. This can help us to resist the dubious notions of what we need that are promoted by advertisers and to recognize the true character of human fulfillment.

IS THOUGHT-FULL; IT RELIES ON BELIEFS AND DEVELOPS IN US CERTAIN KINDS OF WISDOM.

Christian practices are active and embodied, but that does not mean that they don't involve our minds! They do. The biblical story clothes each practice with images and words. In addition, each practice relies on specific Christian beliefs; for example, the belief in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ gives us hope (Grieving) and allows us to repair torn relationships (Forgiveness). However, belief doesn't always come before practice: being members of communities where the Christian practices are really lived can help us to understand and embrace the central beliefs of Christian faith more fully.

IS DONE WITHIN THE CHURCH, IN THE PUBLIC REALM, IN DAILY WORK, AND AT HOME.

A Christian practice is not something we do only at church. Each practice takes shape also at home, at school, at work, and as a dimension of personal spirituality. Christian practices overlap with the practices of other religious groups at many points, though not in every way.

SHAPES THE PEOPLE WHO PARTICIPATE IN THE PRACTICE, AS INDIVIDUALS AND AS COMMUNITIES.

When we live Christian practices, we express who we most truly are: beloved children of God. When we live Christian practices, we also learn to see everyone else as a beloved child of God. In the midst of any given practice, we also acquire specific skills and character traits.

COMES TO A FOCUS IN WORSHIP.

Every Christian worship service involves some practicing of the practices, and a full service that includes Holy Communion gives a taste of all the Way to Live practices. When we worship, we gather up our whole way to live and offer it to God. At the same time, we are prepared to go out once again into a way to live that is deeply shaped by our worshipful encounter with God.

IS A STRAND IN A WHOLE WAY OF LIFE.

Taken all together, Christian practices add up to a way to live. They are woven together: if one is missing, all are distorted in some way. On the other hand, because they are woven together, any one practice can become a gateway into faithful living. Fortunately, almost everyone has at least a little start on some of the practices, even if he or she does not use these words or think of these practices as related to Christian faith.

Offering welcome...managing our stuff...forgiving...making music...praying...

When we live the practices of Christian faith, we join together with Jesus, one another, and a great cloud of witnesses in a way to live that brings abundant life—Life with a capital L—for creation, for other people, and for ourselves.

Additional Resources on Christian Faith Practices

These resources are available at the resource table or in the church library.

[On Our Way: Christian Practices for Living a Whole Life](#) by Dorothy Bass

[Way to Live: Christian Practices for Teens](#) by Dorothy Bass

[Liturgy of the Ordinary: Sacred Practices in Everyday Life](#) by Tish Harrison Warren

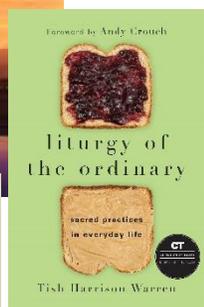
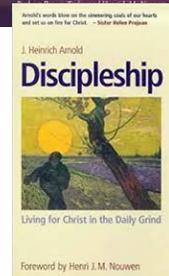
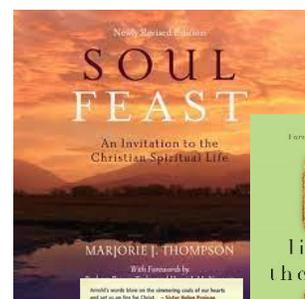
[Soul Feast: An invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life](#) by Marjorie J. Thompson

[Discipleship: Living for Christ in the Daily Grind](#) by Heinrich J. Arnold

[Sacred Pathways: Nine Ways to Connect with God](#) by Gary Thomas

[Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us](#) by Adele Ahlberg Calhoun

[Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth](#) by Richard J. Foster



Theme Overview

Each month we will focus on one faith practice, seeking to model our lives on Jesus.



Month	Theme	Topics	Key Scriptures
September	Welcoming	Hospitality, listening, befriending	Luke 15:2, Matthew 25:35
October	Praying	Adoration, confession, thanksgiving, supplication	Luke 5:16, Matthew 6:9-13
November	Doing Justice	Righteousness, relief, development, reform	Luke 4:18-19, Matthew 14:14, Micah 6:8
December	Advent		
January	Working and resting	Vocation, sabbath	Colossians 3:23, Mark 6:31
February	Hurting and Healing	Grieving, forgiving	John 11:33-36, Matthew 18:21-35
March	Stewarding	Resources, bodies, creation	1 Peter 4:10, James 1:17, Genesis 1:28
April	Neighboring	Knowing and loving those of other faiths, peacemaking, witnessing	Matthew 22:34-40, Luke 10:25-37
May	Worshipping	Reading scripture, music, praise	Colossians 3:16, Hebrews 4:12, Ephesians 5:19

In this Guide

If you used our connection guides in the past, you'll see several familiar features.

1. **More Like Christ through Scripture** – An invitation to read applicable biblical texts and reflect on what it might mean for your life.
2. **More Like Christ in our tradition** – In what ways does our reformed worldview inform how we understand the call to live More Like Christ.
3. **More Like Christ in community** – Here you'll find devotionals, songs, videos, prompts, and other resources for reflection and discussion. We will often include questions for family or small group conversation.
4. **More Like Christ through action** – Reading, reflecting, and talking aren't enough. In this section we suggest practices for you and your whole family that might help you live more like Christ.
5. **Additional resources** - At the end of each connection guide, we offer additional resources for you to learn more and dig deeper.

Resource Table

In collaboration with Penny Hoezee and the library, we have a new opportunity this year - our resource table. Located in the Gathering Area, this spot will be filled with resources connected with each month's theme. There will be books, articles, curriculum, and more. You are invited to borrow these items.

Also look for the kid's table! This spot will feature resources just for children: Children's books, videos, coloring pages, and more!



Speaker Series

On the **second and fourth Tuesdays of the month at noon** in the Sanctuary we invite you to our "More Like Christ" speaker series. Each month a special guest will share their insights with us. These presentations will also be available via our YouTube channel for those who cannot attend in person.

Upcoming speakers:

September 14

Quentin Schultze

Professor Emeritus,
Calvin University

*Communicating with
Grace and Virtue*



September 28

Victoria White

Director of Church
Services, All Belong

*Ten Dimensions of
Belonging*



October 12

**Rev. Neal
Plantinga, Ph. D**

President Emeritus,
Calvin Seminary

*Morning and Evening
Prayers*



October 26

Rev. Nancy Boote

Pastor, Reformed
Church in America

*Abiding in Prayer: Apart
from the Lord we can do
Nothing*



November 9

**Colin P. Watson
Sr.**

Executive Director,
Christian Reformed
Church

*Biblical Justice and the
CRC*



November 23

Rev. Amy Schenkel

Pastor, Christian
Reformed Church

*Things I'm learning
about justice as a church
planter*



More Like Christ through Scripture

Bible readings centered on Welcoming

Sept	Text	Your one sentence takeaway
1	Galatians 3:27-29	
2	Matthew 18:1-5	
3	Luke 15:1-2	
4	Acts 28:28-31	
5	Hebrews 13:1-3	
6	I Peter 4:7-10	
7	Matthew 25:34-46	
8	Leviticus 19:32-36	
9	Luke 14:12-14	
10	Genesis 18:1-8	
11	Luke 10:38-42	
12	Matthew 10:40-42	
13	Exodus 23:6-11	
14	III John	
15	Luke 19:1-10	
16	Acts 8:36-38	
17	2 Samuel 9:1-13	
18	Acts 16:14-15	
19	Proverbs 31:13-20	
20	John 15:12-14	
21	Proverbs 18:12-17	
22	I Samuel 18:1-3	
23	Colossians 3:12-14	
24	Psalms 133	
25	Romans 12:4-13	
26	Romans 12:14-21	
27	Ruth 1:16-17	
28	Proverbs 27:14-17	
29	John 13:1-5	
30	Romans 16:1-16	

More Like Christ in our Tradition

OUR WORLD BELONGS TO GOD, PARAGRAPH 34

In our world, where many journey alone, nameless in the bustling crowd, Satan and his evil forces seek whom they may scatter and isolate; but God, by his gracious choosing in Christ, gathers a new community— those who by God’s gift put their trust in Christ. In the new community all are welcome: the homeless come home, the broken find healing, the sinner makes a new start, the despised are esteemed, the least are honored, and the last are first. Here the Spirit guides and grace abounds.

REFORMED: WHAT IT MEANS, WHY IT MATTERS – BOB DEMOOR

Many Christians consider themselves to be individual followers of Jesus who may or may not decide voluntarily to join other Christians in celebrating or living out the faith. They have a personalized faith that focuses somewhat exclusively on their relationship to the Lord. Reformed believers find that sad. They confess that they have been adopted to be living members of God’s family -of the church. They can’t understand how believers could possibly want to keep themselves outside of the body of Christ.

“...we cannot just crawl into our own little corner and let our light shine.”

Like any family, God’s family on earth has its problems. It’s not always easy to cooperate with our sisters and brothers in the Lord. We’re all different. We have our own likes and dislikes, our own opinions, and our own ways of doing things. But God’s word clearly points out that God’s vision for us is to be a family that stays together, prays together, and even plays together. And in Mathew 28:18-20 our risen Lord has made it abundantly clear what our common mission is – to disciple not just ourselves, but all the nations of the world. To achieve that, we cannot just crawl into our own little corner and let our light shine. We’ll need to work together, empowered by God’s spirit and led by our risen Lord.

More Like Christ in Community

Hospitality

HOSPITALITY FROM THE HEART – REV. ERICA DEKKER

Our North American culture today is a study in contrasts. On the one hand we’re surrounded by messages upon messages of how to offer hospitality: magazine articles outline the proper place settings and most attractive tableware; television shows demonstrate how to create a lovely, color-coordinated living space; question-and-answer sections in newspapers respond to our concerns about what is the best host/hostess gift to bring to an event.

On the other hand, we sense a real loss of honest-to-goodness hospitality. We can live next door to our neighbors for years without knowing each other’s names. We may have close working relationships with colleagues but never catch a glimpse of one another’s home or family life. We might attend the same church services week in and week out with nothing more than a passing hello to fellow church members.

Of course I'm highlighting the extremes, but there's more than a grain of truth to these observations.

I wonder at this disconnect, but instead of getting into all the reasons behind it, I'd rather spend some time looking at another possibility. Nope, it's not another list of how-tos or must-dos, nor is it meant to pile on guilt for our failings. Instead, it's a glimpse of how things might look if we practiced true hospitality.

WHAT IS IT?

What is true hospitality? It's a way of living that models God's love and welcome of us. We love and welcome others because God has loved and welcomed us. But we also embrace others because God loves and welcomes them as much as he does us. (I know we all say we believe this, but it's a radical notion when we really take the time to ponder it.) True hospitality tries to see others with God's eyes, and when we do that we realize just how loving and welcoming God is!

"We love and welcome others because God has loved and welcomed us."

Jesus not only modeled this holy hospitality, he tells a parable that shows how essential it is. In Matthew 25:31-46 he says that those who offer food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, invitation to the stranger, clothes to those in need, care to the sick, and visits to the prisoners are blessed because "whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers [and sisters] of mine, you did for me" (v. 40).

Christine Pohl, the author of [Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition](#) (available on the resource table), offers this brief but helpful definition: "Hospitality mean[s] extending to strangers a quality of kindness usually reserved for friends and family." It means being attentive to the needs of those around us—whether we know them well or are just meeting them for the first time—and being willing to attend to those needs.

You may know of a newly arrived immigrant who could use help getting to know her new city. You may have heard of an exchange student looking for a semester's lodging. You may have noticed that a work colleague or fellow church member seems always on the fringes and might welcome an invitation for an evening of food and fellowship. All these are opportunities for offering genuine hospitality.

COKE AND COOKIES

In my 30-plus years I've had the opportunity to experience this kind of hospitality—both as a receiver and giver. As a missionary's kid in Guatemala I remember visiting a Mayan-Indian family in their one-room house and being offered a bottle of Coke and store-bought cookies—a nearly unheard-of treat that must have cost the family more than it could really afford. When I was a teenager, my family moved to Edmonton, Alberta, where we were embraced by another family who regularly opened their home to us and even welcomed our visitors to their Christmas celebrations.

My parents also modeled this kind of hospitality. They readily opened their home to newcomers and strangers in whatever community they found themselves. From a one-time meal with a lonely college student to a newly arrived refugee's several-month stay, my parents intentionally cultivated the spirit of Christian hospitality.

These and countless other experiences have shaped how my husband and I cultivate hospitality in our lives. We are by no means perfect at it, but we are mindful and intentional about it. We keep our eyes, ears, and hearts open to opportunities to offer hospitality. At church we try to seek out those individuals or families whom we haven't yet met. Through our respective workplaces we have invited newcomers over for dinner. Our kids' preschool has offered another opportunity for opening our home to children and parents whose backgrounds are both similar and very different from ours.

A WAY OF LIFE

I'll be the first to admit that being hospitable isn't always or necessarily easy. Interacting with strangers who are different from me in countless ways can be challenging and awkward or just plain disappointing. Often it's much simpler to stick with the friends and relationships that already exist.

However, we keep challenging ourselves to be hospitable because, as Christ-followers, it's simply, and significantly, a way of life. "Hospitality is not optional for Christians, nor is it limited to those who are specially gifted for it," Pohl writes. "It is, instead, a necessary practice in the community of faith."

God created the world and its people out of a spirit of hospitality. God sent Jesus to redeem the world and its people out of this same spirit. And the Holy Spirit moves around and within the world and its people because God was, is, and will be a hospitable God.

The beauty and strength of hospitality is that, whether on the giving or the receiving end, there is potential for great growth and blessing. Community can be strengthened. Bonds that may stretch between continents can be initiated and grown. Minds can be stretched, challenged, and changed, and hearts transformed. When you open your heart and home to a stranger, there's no telling what God might bring of it.

Hospitality is making room within ourselves for the other. That might sound daunting, but it needn't be because true hospitality is endless and boundless in how it is lived out. It's not just for super-friendly people who have big, beautiful houses with homemade food always on hand. It's for all who desire to follow Christ, regardless of their specific situation.

You may be introverted or extroverted. You may have an expansive home or a small, cozy apartment. You may have fresh muffins on the counter or store-bought cookies in the cupboard. You may host a large family potluck or a small, formal dinner or simply coffee on the deck with just one or two others. The moment may have been weeks in the planning or thought of at the last minute. It's the spirit of hospitality, and not the specifics, that matters.



Christian Reformed pastor Jim Kok has written a book called *90% of Helping Is Just Showing Up* (*available in the church library*). I'd like to propose that "90% of Hospitality Is Just Making the Effort." There's no one right way to do it. Rather, see where your innate strengths and gifts take you. Start with what's comfortable and keep on challenging yourself. Yes, being hospitable takes effort; it's self-giving because it moves us to make room for others who might be considerably different from us. But who knows what

blessing God might bestow through you or for you as you foster a heart of hospitality? It's an opportunity not to be missed.

FOR DISCUSSION

- *Talk about your best memory of hospitality. What was it about this occasion that made it stick in your mind?*
- *When did you feel excluded from a community? What was that like?*
- *Discuss Erika Dekker's definition of hospitality: "It's a way of living that models God's love and welcome of us."*
- *In what ways do you offer hospitality?*
- *What opportunities have you noticed in your church, work, or neighborhood that invite you to be hospitable?*
- *How well is your congregation doing in offering hospitality to visitors? How could you do better?*



HOW SOME CHURCHES PRACTICE HOSPITALITY - ELIZABETH TURMAN-BRYANT

www.georgetowncrc.org/hospitalityvideo

Seven common threads of welcoming congregations:

1. Radical Hospitality must be modeled by the leadership and owned by the congregation. @3:42
2. Partner with a bridge-group that's doing hands-on work. @4:32
3. Invite people into service and leadership @5:08
4. Eat together @5:40
5. Keeping the vision alive @4:58
6. Ecumenically minded @6:53
7. A space of grace, nonjudgment @7:18



FOR DISCUSSION:

- *Biblical hospitality, philoxenia, literally means "love the stranger". Who in your life seems strange or is a stranger to you?*
- *Which of the seven threads of hospitality is the most difficult in our community? Which is the easiest?*
- *How can we do personally to practice hospitality? What might we do as a faith community?*



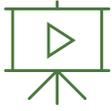
Listening

"Listening is a form of spiritual hospitality by which you invite strangers to become friends, to get to know their inner selves more fully, and even to dare to be silent with you."

~Henry Nouwen

WHAT IS LISTENING -- AND HOW DO WE LISTEN WELL? – QUENTIN J. SCHULTZE

www.georgetowncrc.org/listeningvideo



In his *Theology of Communication* series, Professor Quentin J. Schultze tells us that listening is not just hearing. Listening is all about becoming intimate with reality -- with the way things really are. Fools speak before knowing what they are talking about. Wise persons listen first.



- *Professor Schultze describes listening as attending to reality, to the way things really are. Why might this be difficult for us sometimes?*
- *Give an example of way we might listen to each of the realities:*
 - *Scripture*
 - *Jesus*
 - *Creation*
 - *Culture*



A THEOLOGY OF LISTENING - SARA KORBER-DEWEERD

Some of us are better at listening than others. My youngest child, who has Down syndrome, often finds himself in the position of listener. He needs extra help learning new skills, so he listens for guidance. It takes him more time to process language, so he listens to understand. It takes him longer to formulate speech, and sometimes conversations move on before he can add his thoughts. His family, teachers, friends, and classmates have to slow down in order to really know what he thinks. They have to listen.

THE PRIVILEGE OF BEING HEARD

Until I began navigating the challenges of communication with my son, I never thought of the ability to be heard as a privilege, a luxury available to some but not others. As a quiet child, I often chose not to speak, because it made me uncomfortable; I didn't enjoy the attention. Being an introvert made me a careful observer of people. I learned a lot by listening—about others' differences and beliefs, about their strengths and challenges. But I've rarely been forced into that listening position.

Sometimes when he feels left out, my son grows frustrated. Having been ignored for too long, he inserts himself into conversations at his breaking point. His yelling or aggression is met with our reminders to be patient, but I often wonder how long he was waiting before we finally heard him.

In the political arena, even our churches, it sometimes seems as if everyone is talking, but no one is listening. I think of my son and the way he has always been compelled to listen, to hang on the margins of a conversation. Perhaps we can learn from those who are compelled to listen with forced regularity.

Slowing down to listen to my son and to my daughters has reminded me of the listening posture I was comfortable assuming as a child. As a white, middle-class, heterosexual, non-disabled woman whose many privileges are unearned, I now recognize the benefit of choosing silence more often—not out of discomfort or fear, but out of a need to understand. Life with my son has also taught me there are many

reasons for silence; whether chosen or forced, it does not mean that those who don't speak or are not heard have nothing meaningful to offer.

Imagine if we began listening to the silences themselves. Who is not present? Who has not felt welcome? What would it require of us to invite new voices?

FROM TOLERANCE TO LISTENING

In today's information-saturated climate, we're inundated with others' convictions and opinions. We're expected to be tolerant of differences and asked to keep any "narrow" views to ourselves. Yet I am consistently shocked by the intolerance of a mainstream culture that prides itself on tolerance. What happens, then, when tolerance begins to look like intolerance? Tolerance no longer serves when it demands my quiet acceptance that division or injustice "is just the way things are." Is there a third way?

It's time to shift the cultural focus on absolute tolerance to a more complex focus on listening. Tolerance and listening are not the same thing. Tolerance demands we abide by the rhetoric of the day, no matter how offensive. But listening, though it often requires our own silence, is always active and always engaged. We lay down our personal agenda; we silence long-held convictions not to avoid offending, but instead to understand. And maybe after we listen, we ask questions. Maybe we invite respectful dialogue, with the goal of seeing God in us—*imago Dei*.

People have often commented that our son is especially kind and emotionally intuitive, that he can read the feelings in a room with incredible and compassionate accuracy. I wonder if the practice of forced listening has equipped him with these superpowers, ones that individuals with Down syndrome are often said to possess. I'm not a fan of stereotypes that label individuals with disabilities; even positive labels have the power to subsume personal identity. But what if emotional intuition and interpersonal skills are not a stereotype, but a gift that some possess and grow by practiced repetition, a gift that has been cultivated, whether voluntarily or not?

LISTENING AS AN ACT OF LOVE

Listening is not dangerous; it will not subject the listener to unwitting conversion—perhaps convictions will remain unchanged; perhaps they shouldn't. Listening does not lead to division beyond reconciliation; it is, in fact, the first step toward it, because listening is an act of love.

Imagine if when marginalized people groups spoke in the church to identify it as a historical place of oppression, coerced silence, and abuse, rather than quickly coming to our own defense or, worse, not responding at all, we said, "Tell us more." These three simple words invite dialogue, and they make us ready to listen. These are the words my husband and I have been taught to use by speech therapists when our son produces an utterance that is too short to make his meaning clear but we know he wants his words to mean more. "Tell us more" is an invitation for him to try again, but it is also a signal that we, his family, are prepared to wait and to listen—that we want to understand. Do we in the church want to understand?

"Listening is not dangerous; it will not subject the listener to unwitting conversion."

Consider also that there is more than one kind of silence. The silence of listening is active and engaged. But there is another kind of silence. Too often I have heard well-meaning Christians insist that our communal spaces remain apolitical. But that is impossible, because what is political is also personal. The choice to remain silent in the face of injustice is itself political, one that often perpetuates the very injustices we hope to avoid. In these cases, silence is a kind of consent. We should not be surprised, for example, when peaceful protests turn violent. While no one condones violence, it is a symptom of a dominant culture that has too long ignored the pain and injustice of systemic racism.

FINDING COMMON GROUND

If we believe what Genesis tells us, that we are created in God’s image, then our common ground is not our opinions but each other. So if I am an image bearer and you are, too, what can we offer one another? How do we need each other? What shred of holiness is in us that we might bring it to bear even on our disagreements?

When we recognize that our shared humanity is rooted in our shared Creator, we don’t need to agree to find common ground. Listening can help us navigate hot-button topics that have the power to divide—topics such as sexuality, abuse, discrimination, racism, and injustice. When we quiet the noise of competing ideologies, then we can listen. When we listen, then we can understand. When we understand and repent, then we can act. I see now that there are many steps to take before action. But too often, we leap before we look, we speak before we hear. In such a noisy world, perhaps a theology of listening is long overdue.

FOR DISCUSSION

- *Have you ever experienced an occasion when you felt people were not listening to you? Describe how you felt at the time and how you overcame the problem.*
- *Why do you think our culture is generally poor at actively listening to others?*
- *How can we improve our listening skills?*
- *How might believing that “our common ground is not our opinions but each other,” as people made in God’s image, change our approach to divisive conversations?*



Befriending

FRIENDS (EXCERPT) – WAY TO LIVE, CAROL AND KATIE LYTCH

In a memorable scene from the movie *Remember the Titans*, the high-school football team basks in the golden glow of an upset victory over its rival. Gerry, the team captain, is surrounded by the popular crowd at the high school. They invite him to a party - a party for white students only. Suddenly he has a tough choice to make. Should he get into a flashy car with this group, which includes his girlfriend? Or should he celebrate with a smaller group of his teammates, including his new best friend, who is African- American?



This movie is based on the true story of racial tensions surrounding the integration of a suburban Washington, D.C., high school in 1971. But Gerry could face the same choice in thousands of other high schools today: Should he go with the popular crowd or be true to his friends?

Everyone wants to be popular, right? Or do they? Gerry was popular. At his moment of decision, however, he realized that being popular was not necessarily the same thing as being a good friend.

POPULARITY VS. FRIENDSHIP

Being popular is not necessarily the same thing as being a good friend. Being popular implies that a large number of people view you as someone they want to hang out with. Being a good friend means being loyal, not betraying confidences, and listening when someone is struggling with a problem. Some people are both, but usually being a really good friend suggests you put more of your time into fewer relationships. We all want to have good friends. But are we always ready to be good friends? What if being a good friend to one person gets in the way of being popular with many others?

Some people are so eager to be popular that they don't stop to think about what friendship actually means. They may insincerely flatter in order to win the approval of the "in group." They may try to stir up rivalries between friends, hoping to divide them and take one of the friends for themselves. They may even resort to cruelty that they think will enhance their popularity.

We all want to have good friends. But are we always ready to be good friends?

CLIQUES VS. CIRCLE OF FRIENDS

Clique is a negative term implying snobbery and exclusiveness. But it is normal and healthy to establish friendships with particular people in regular and stable ways so that a circle of friends develops. You may enjoy the same activities as certain other people or simply like spending time with them. As part of your loyalty to one another, you establish informal understandings about who is in your circle. A dependable circle of friends can give you a secure feeling. Yet by creating an "inside" of the circle, you automatically create an "outside." This divide between "in" and "out" is the tricky part.

Jesus had twelve friends who formed a definite circle. Yet he also had good friends beside these twelve disciples, include Mary, Martha, and their brother, Lazarus. He cared so much for them that he wept when Lazarus died. And Jesus' friendships also extended beyond the people who were like him. In fact, he associated with those who were shunned – tax collectors, sinners, and groups that were hated, such as the Samaritans. Jesus' circle of friends was an ever-growing, welcoming circle.

FOR DISCUSSION

- *What is your circle of friends like? Is it open and welcoming, or is it enclosed by high walls with a border guard to check the credentials of anyone who wants in?*
- *Does your circle include friends from another culture? Race? Age-group? Economic level?*
- *In what ways could you influence your friendship circle to welcome different kinds of newcomers?*



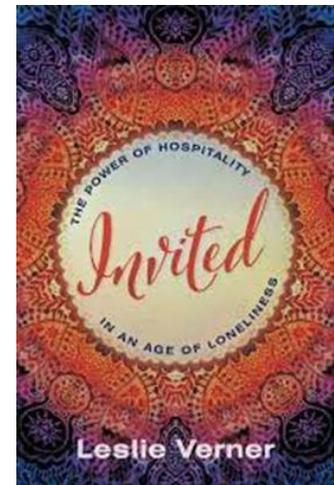
More Like Christ through action

IDEAS FOR INVITING – FROM THE BOOK *INVITED* BY LESLIE VERNER

This list offers ways to practice the principles of hospitality in different seasons and stages of life. It is less of a to-do list and more of a springboard to launch you into relationships within your own community and context. I hope these ideas prompt you to think outside the box and help broaden your hospitality horizons with your neighbors, church, community, friends, and soon-to-be friends. I also added a few ways we can include our children in our gatherings. At the end of this list, you'll find some general hospitality tips from this book as a reminder that hospitality doesn't need to be complicated or overwhelming. Please don't use this list as a way to berate yourself for what you are not doing. Instead, I hope you feel energized and inspired by all the unique ways we can enjoy our shared life together.

NEIGHBORS

- Give new neighbors a gift basket to welcome them to the neighborhood.
- Intentionally spend time outside in your front yard or a public or other shared area. You may even want to put a picnic table or swing in your front yard.
- Go on walks in your neighborhood and talk to neighbors you meet. Ask some neighbors to regularly go on a walk with you.
- Invite neighbors to go with you to a local high school sporting event and have pizza afterward.
- Go sledding and invite neighbors back to your home for hot chocolate.
- Project a movie onto a garage door or external wall for an outdoor movie night. Or gather in your home to watch a televised sporting event, the Oscars, or a movie.
- Rotate soup nights in a different neighbor's home every week during winter months.
- Host a block party (many cities offer grant money for this).
- Organize a monthly cookout, taco night, soup night, potluck, campfire, or book club.
- Hold a garage or yard sale-and actually talk to the people who stop by.
- Host a cookie or soup exchange.
- Coordinate a clothing or stuff swap.
- Host a s'mores and campfire night in the fall or an ice cream social in the summer.
- Plan a neighborhood bike parade where kids decorate bikes beforehand. End with a barbecue.
- Invite neighbor kids for a kiddie pool and sprinkler hangout. Invite their parents to come over for a potluck or cookout.
- Organize your neighbors to help each other with yard work-helping earns you the privilege of receiving help for your yard.
- See if your neighbors might be interested in a neighborhood Easter egg hunt.



GET KIDS INVOLVED

- Have kids help you deliver invitations to neighbors for a party.

- Let your kids help you prepare the meal and set the table. Have them make place cards or small gifts for guests.
- If you have teenagers, tell them they are free to have their friends over to your home to hang out. (Hint: have lots of snacks.)
- Bake something to bring to a neighbor, and take it over together with your children.
- Get to know other parents at your kids' activities; invite the team to your home for a pre- or postgame or concert meal.
- Invite your kids' friends to join you on a hike or walk or at a park.
- Prioritize family dinners.
- Visit a nursing home with your kids.
- Help your kids set up a lemonade stand-introduce yourselves to the neighbors who stop by.

CHURCH

- Invite a new family or person over to your home or out for lunch. (Maybe get a group together so individuals don't feel intimidated.)
- Invite a group of moms and their children over for coffee and muffins. Or host a weekly coffee group for parents of young children at your church.
- Have a new parents brunch every quarter to encourage and support new parents.
- Have a weekly picnic or cookout after church during the summer.
- Accompany new visitors to the nursery, sanctuary, bathroom, or coffee area. Don't just point them in the right direction-walk with them. You may want to offer them your contact information.
- Display good signage and written information for church visitors.
- Invite college students, international students, single people, or widows or widowers after church-any time is wonderful, but especially during holidays.
- Invite your pastor or other church leader over to your home, or offer to bring them a meal on a Sunday.
- Host a newcomers luncheon in a home or at your church.
- Invite one person or couple you want to get to know better over for lunch, tea, coffee, or dessert.
- Mark certain dates in the church calendar for celebration and invite a few people to join you.
- Even if you don't have young children, keep a few toys on hand for guests who may have kids.
- Pray for your neighbors and city in your church and Bible studies and pick a few ideas from the rest of this list to do together.



COMMUNITY

- Learn the name of cashiers in the grocery store. Make eye contact, say thank you, and consider asking them questions about their day.

- Frequent the same parks, coffee shops, or library on the same days and times. Pay attention to who is there.
- Spend an extra five minutes talking to a stranger somewhere.
- Attend a local event-like a storytelling night at an independent bookstore, a town meeting, or a concert-and introduce yourself to someone.
- Volunteer regularly at a nursing home, prison, ESL class, adult literacy class, school, homeless shelter, or pregnancy center. When appropriate, invite new friends back to your home.
- Find a program that helps refugee families adapt to life in your city.
- Invite your child's principal, coach, or teacher over for a meal. Invite parents and families from your child's school over for a party or cookout.

FRIENDS AND SOON-TO-BE FRIENDS

- Throw simple birthday parties for your kids and invite a wide variety of guests.
- Host a game night or an open-house-style game day.
- Cook a meal together with some people you want to get to know better.
- Invite those who love reading over for a "books and bottles party" where each person brings a favorite book and a bottle of something to drink to share. The host prepares book-related trivia and prizes as an opener. After that, each guest spends one minute introducing their book, then the guests exchange books "white elephant" style.
- Invite a group over for a "poetry, prose, and pour party" where each guest brings a drink and writing or art to share (if you do this with church friends, they could add a spiritual element).
- Host a music night where everyone brings an instrument and plays together.
- Plan a Valentine's Day party for married couples where each person brings an object to describe their spouse. The spouse has to guess what their partner might have brought and why. Play the Newlywed Game.
- Start a new tradition: weekly swing dance nights, Taco Tuesdays, or Friday night meatballs where you invite friends to bring salad, bread, and dessert.
- Offer to babysit a friend's kids or bring their kids along on your outings.
- Invite people into what you're already doing: sewing, watching a television show or game, making cards, freezer meal prep, baking, biking, hiking, jogging, cookie decorating, painting, or present wrapping.
- Ask coworkers over for dinner or dessert.
- Host a dinner with six to eight people. Ask each person to bring one course (this is a good opportunity to try some new recipes and non-kid-friendly food). Have questions prepared or a theme to discuss over your meal.



GENERAL TIPS FOR UNCERTAIN HOSTS

- If you have food, people will come.
- Ask your guests to bring something or to help you.
- Plan ahead, but don't be afraid to be spontaneous.

- To combat decision fatigue, make the same meal every time. (My friend's parents made spaghetti every single Sunday and invited different families over after the church service.)
- Ask guests ahead of time if they have any food restrictions.
- Keep in mind that conversations can often go deeper with a smaller group.
- Prepare food in advance as much as possible.
- Invite someone to sit with you at church or a conference, retreat, or meeting.
- Remember that people are more significant than the environment, food, or cleanliness of the home.
- Hospitality doesn't have to happen inside your home.
- Go deep with a few, but also reach out to those who are not in the "friends or family" category-yet.
- Know that you are probably already doing more than you know in terms of hospitality.
- Remember that it's okay to take breaks for solitude to regroup and re-root yourself in the love of God.
- Don't forget: the more you practice hospitality, the easier it gets.



Additional Resources and Further Study

Resources in italics are available at the resource table or in the church library.

Welcoming

Communicating with Grace and Virtue: Learning to Listen, Speak, Text, and Interact as a Christian by Quentin J. Schultze

Befriend: Create Belonging in an Age of Judgment, Isolation, and Fear by Scott Sauls

Heartfelt Hospitality: Radical & Rewarding by Jane Loerop

Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition by Christine D. Pohl

The Turquoise Table: Finding Community and Connection in Your Own Front Yard by Kristin Schell | [Review](#)

Invited: The Power of Hospitality in an Age of Loneliness by Leslie Verner | [Review](#)

You Welcomed Me: Loving Refugees and Immigrants Because God First Loved Us by Kent Annan

Bowling Alone: Revised and Updated: The Collapse and Revival of American Community by Robert D. Putnam

Untamed Hospitality (The Christian Practice of Everyday Life) by Elizabeth Newman

The Listening Life: Embracing Attentiveness in a World of Distraction by Adam S. McHugh | [Review](#)

Church, Why Bother by Philip Yancey

Growing Young: Six Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church by Powell, Mulder, and Griffin

Resources for kids

We Belong to Each Other by Liz Marie Galvan, Jose Galvan, and Katie Rewse (Illustrator)

God's Very Good Idea: A True Story of God's Delightfully Different Family by Trillia J. Newbell and Catalina Echeverri (Illustrator)

This Is the Church by Sarah Raymond Cunningham and Ariel Landy (Illustrator)

