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A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO DISCIPLESHIP

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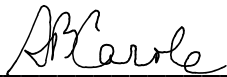
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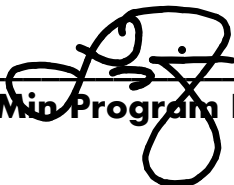
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ABSTRACT

Gabriela Rodriguez

Hospitality: A Holistic Approach to Discipleship

The telos of every Christian faith community is to develop faithful followers of Jesus Christ that emulate the character of Christ and impact their communities and the world. Congregations must intentionally resist the temptations of: moving away from others in fear, becoming inwardly focused, and responding with inhospitable attitudes. Ministry from the perspective of self-preservation will lead to unfaithfulness to our Trinitarian and Wesleyan ecclesiology and ecclesial practices, as well as a pervasive church culture that is contrary to the call of God which requires believers to embody divine hospitality in the world.

The formation of faithful disciples of Christ requires individuals and church communities to be intentional about embodying holistic hospitality: to God, self and others. This dissertation will demonstrate that a church can overcome unfaithfulness to ecclesiology when her discipleship ministry is founded on biblical hospitality. To demonstrate that holistic hospitality exemplifies the values of the kingdom and provides a strong and faithful framework for discipleship in a church community we will delve into the theology of hospitality based on the nature of God, Scripture, and Benedictine spirituality. We will show that hospitality is indeed the goal of discipleship. And we will demonstrate how intentionally hospitable churches that meet sociological, psychological, and spiritual needs of people can inspire their laity to join God's hospitable mission in the world and sustain a culture of hospitality.

CHAPTER 1: THE PROBLEM: UNFAITHFULNESS TO ECCLESIOLOGY

Introduction

Every Christian church has a unique history and context but the call for every church is the very same: we are called to “go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19). The task is massive, and it often feels overwhelming for churches to know where to begin the journey of intentional discipleship. Such a big task has left many churches floundering at the point of an intentional discipleship ministry that would help strengthen and develop faithful follower of Jesus Christ. The church’s primary vocation as understood in Wesleyan ecclesiology is to reflect to others the holy love of the Triune God, and yet, when people enter through the doors of many Nazarene churches in the United States today, they are not always met with the hospitality of God that we find reflected in the pages of Scripture. The aim of this project is to demonstrate that holistic hospitality is a necessary means by which churches can faithfully form disciples of Jesus Christ, overcoming unfaithfulness to ecclesiology and ecclesial practices, which are both a common problem in the church. We will do this by demonstrating that holistic hospitality is theologically profound because it is biblical, it reflects the nature of God, and it has stood the test of time in church history particularly in Benedictine spirituality. We will demonstrate that the formation of hospitable Christians is the goal of discipleship. And, we will demonstrate how hospitable churches that intentionally work to meet sociological, psychological, and spiritual needs of people can inspire their laity to join God’s hospitable mission in the world and thus sustain an ecclesial culture of hospitality.

We move now to discuss the problem of inhospitality that is found in many Nazarene churches in the United States today and is evidenced by sinful practices, attitudes, and behaviors.

“Church We Have a Problem”

A look at ecclesial life evidences a variety of sinful practices: racism, political idolatry, and self-protection. These are contrary to the mission of God in the world and must be called out, uprooted and overcome in order for the church to be a faithful partner with God in the restoration of the world.

The Sin of Racism

Scripture states that all people are created in the *imago Dei* or the image of God.¹ Without a proper understanding of this doctrine, we can fall into the trap of racism extremes, believing *our* race is better or superior. Although, a quick look at church history in the United States shows that we are not where we once were in support of slavery, silently standing by watching lynchings, and participating in the public abuse of black Americans and other minority groups; racism is still found in our 21st century churches. It is often well concealed and camouflaged to the point that it is almost unrecognizable to those perpetrating it. Feelings of superiority, greed, and abuse of power, as well as cultural isolation are theological sins that have been committed by the church and foster racism.

Feeling superior to another group of people because of race leads to racism. This attitude whether open or hidden, creates an ecclesial culture that is unwelcoming and inhospitable and stands against God’s original plan for human beings which was that diversity of cultures would be respected and appreciated. “When God commanded the first

¹ Genesis 1:26.

human beings to ‘fill the earth,’ it was a decree to create cultures, because no one culture, people or language can adequately reflect the splendor of God.”² Furthermore, “Christian theology consistently affirms that all humans, male and female, were created to bear God’s image on the earth. Just as this applies to both genders, it applies also to people of all nations, tribes, and tongues.”³ However, when one group feels superior to another, they will act out in ways that are harmful and suppressive to members of that particular group. The testimony of Scripture on cultural matters is clear and should be inescapable for Christians, and yet, “sins of prejudice are among the last to be uprooted from redeemed hearts.”⁴ We quickly absolve ourselves of crimes of failing to love our neighbors even while “we alienate ourselves from people who are unlike us and develop an aversion to them based on our prejudices, stereotypes and fears.”⁵ This type of cultural isolation breeds the xenophobia that is at the core of racism and ethnocentrism. Our history shows that we have done a poor job of living out a theology that affirms that all are equal at the table of the Lord and that honors God’s heart for all people.

Greed and abuse of power also breed racism and are deeply rooted in our American way of life and have infiltrated the church. Freedom and equality were not foundations upon which the United States was established; quite to the contrary, “the US economy was based on the abduction and enslavement of African people, the displacement and genocide of Indigenous people, and the annexation of Mexican lands.”⁶ The very idea of racial

² Brenda Salter McNeil, *Roadmap to Reconciliation: Moving Communities into Unity, Wholeness and Justice* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2015), 24.

³ Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, Steve Kang, and Gary Parrett, *A Many Colored Kingdom: Multicultural Dynamics for Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: 2004), 52.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁵ Brenda Salter McNeil and Rick Richardson, *The Heart of Racial Justice: How Soul Change Leads to Social Change* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2009), 135.

⁶ Robin DiAngelo, *White Fragility: Why It’s So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2018), 15-16.

inferiority was created to justify unequal treatment.⁷ The United States has gravely sinned in the area of racism; and, for many years, the church has not only stood by silently and watched but also actively participated in the abuse. Perkins shares these eye-opening statements: “most of the outstanding killings and murderings of Blacks in the South have had white ministers involved in them”⁸ and “tragically, but true—churchgoers in America are the slowest to change.”⁹ Greed and abuse of power are sins that the church must continuously repent from because it is the very thing that has allowed racism to exist.

Cultural isolation is also a sin of masked racism that needs to be uprooted in the American Church and that can be seen in many monocultural churches. As a first-generation American citizen Latina, I understand how important it was for people like my grandparents and parents to find spaces for commonality. Monocultural churches give people who feel like they are in the wilderness or in exile a safe place to feel seen and heard, and they also serve to help people like me not forget their culture and to learn to appreciate it. However, what is often lacking in this ministry model is a robust ecclesiology that focuses on the overarching culture of the kingdom of God; a kingdom that is inclusive, welcoming, and hospitable to all people.

While monocultural churches have an important mission and purpose, it becomes very difficult to learn the culture of the kingdom over and above the subculture of ethnicity one might be trying to protect. When a church limits its outreach exclusively to one race or cultural background the risk is taken for divisions within the body to happen and for a subculture of cultural isolation to fester. When there is no overarching discipleship model

⁷ Ibid., 16.

⁸ John Perkins, *Let Justice Roll Down* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing, 1976), 164.

⁹ Ibid., 193.

that intentionally teaches the church about kingdom ecclesiology focused on love and hospitality, monocultural segregation can easily become a hidden sin that seeks to maintain racial purity as a primary agenda.

To have cultural distinctives is fine, but to intentionally hold to them to the exclusion of sharing Christ with other cultures is a contradiction to the biblical principles of reconciliation. “Reconciliation is an ongoing spiritual process involving forgiveness, repentance and justice that restores broken relationships and systems to reflect God’s original intention for all creation to flourish.”¹⁰ Earthly cultures are God’s gift and creation, but Christ’s culture should reign supreme. Christ’s work is about reconciling all people to God and to one another. An ecclesiology that focuses on something other than that is faulty and breeds something dangerously contrary to the mission of God.

I have spoken about monocultural churches as those who minister specifically to a group based on language or ethnicity and voiced various concerns that could lead to concealed racism within that model. However, the truth is that the majority of Nazarene churches in the United States are monocultural even when language is not a problem. By nature, human beings divide into groupings of those that have commonalities of race, socioeconomic status and education and exclude those who are different. Even in a time where, supposedly, racial divisions are being overcome, most Nazarene churches are primarily “mono-cultural.”¹¹ They minister primarily to one group of people to the exclusion of all others. And even when the hope is present for people of other ethnicities or socioeconomic statuses to join the church, steps are not taken to make people feel

¹⁰ McNeil, *Roadmap to Reconciliation*, 22.

¹¹ Appendix A shows the latest data from the Church of the Nazarene in the United States and Canada where 78% of churches are still monocultural.

welcome once they do enter our churches. The primary belief is that they will simply have to adjust to “our culture” if they want to fit in. “Our culture” is more reflective of the American culture that promotes a feeling of superiority of one culture over another, than the way of Christ.

It is alarming to see that while US society is becoming extremely diverse the church continues to insist on the practice of separate worship based on racial and cultural backgrounds. “It is unfortunate that even though some congregations are in the position to make their churches a multicultural and multiracial community, they intentionally fail to do so.”¹² The Church seems comfortable in letting others (schools, businesses, work force, etc.) lead the way in racial reconciliation. Looking at the current plight of the church some might suggest that there is more racial prejudice inside the Christian church than outside of it. The church cannot take pride in doctrinal and theological purity when we allow segregation and racism to dim the light of the gospel. The world will only be convinced that the church is indeed a better alternative when we begin to live out the words of Jesus found in John 13:34, “As I have loved you, so you must love one another.” We live in the postmodern era where people are generally skeptical and cynical of organized religion. The church has lost the public’s trust due to our general response to racism and discrimination when it is discovered. This has left postmodern generations seeking for something real and authentic. “The church needs to help its members humble themselves, pray and seek God’s face, turn from their wicked ways, and confront their demons of racial prejudice”.¹³ This

¹² Boubakar Sanou, “Ethnicity, Tribalism and Racism: A Global Challenge for the Christian Church and Its Mission,” *The Journal of Applied Christian Leadership* 1, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 96.

¹³ Ibid., 101.

is the only way that we as the church can be better equipped to minister to the world in authentic ways that bring about transformation.

There is a tremendous disparity between the vision God has for the church and our current social reality, “and Christians seem powerless to even begin bridging the gap.”¹⁴ However, because the church has been given the ministry of reconciliation, we must dutifully pursue it. “The generational effects of slavery, segregation, and the systemic use of violence—including the lynching of more than 4,000 black men, women and children throughout the United States between 1877 and 1950—are realities that must be fully recognized and addressed in any process that hopes to combat racism.”¹⁵ The church must be different and must do better! “It’s God’s desire that each of us be a part of healing humanity...become agents of change and transformation in a world that desperately needs healing.”¹⁶

In this section we have seen that racism can easily seep into the church by condoning feelings of superiority, greed, abuse of power, and cultural isolation. In Chapter 4 of this project, we will demonstrate how an ecclesiology based on intentional hospitality begins to transform the ecclesiological culture of a community into one of acceptance and reconciliation. However, others sin must be confessed before we can move on towards healing: political idolatry and a mindset of self-protection.

The Sin of Political Idolatry

When God established for God’s people what it meant to be in covenant relationship with God, God began at the place of allegiance and idolatry. The Ten

¹⁴ McNeil and Richardson, *The Heart of Racial Justice*, 19.

¹⁵ Olga Segura, “How the church can recognize the legacy of slavery and move toward reconciliation,” *America* (September 27, 2019): 10. <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2019/09/27>.

¹⁶ McNeil, *Roadmap to Reconciliation*, 125.

Commandments reveal that idolatry of any kind is sinful and breaks relationship with God.¹⁷ Idolatry can be defined as having extreme admiration, love or reverence for something or someone and allowing them/that to occupy the place that belongs to God alone. Idolatry is a sin that hinders believers from faithfully following Christ because it limits our loyalty and allegiance to God. As God's people, we are to intentionally pursue reconciliation, and that "pushes us to look for 'one another's' in new places, flinging open the doors of community to make space for God's Spirit to move powerfully."¹⁸ Yet, though we hold to the belief that we are being formed by God into a people who stand in stark contrast to the ways of the world, there are worldly belief systems and attitudes in the church that have been allowed to fester due to the idolization of politics. The cross of Jesus is the most powerful symbol we hold to as believers when developing an ecclesiology of love and hospitality. Since "the cross is not only revelation but also vocation,"¹⁹ we must boldly confess that any idols we erect that grab hold of our allegiance and affection and ask us to act contrary to Christ, must be dismantled and destroyed in our faith communities.

Politics can so easily become an idol in the heart of the Christian. We like to assert that our churches hold to the rule of God and not of the nations, "that the boundaries of God's kingdom transcend those of Caesar, and that the main political task of the church is the formation of people who see clearly the cost of discipleship and are willing to pay the price."²⁰ However, a nation that promises safety and comfort is a tempting idol to worship,

¹⁷ Exodus 20:3-4

¹⁸ Jessica Mast, "'For You Were Aliens': Discipleship in Loving the Other," *Vision* 13, no. 12 (Fall 2012): 25.

¹⁹ William Willimon, *Fear of the Other: No Fear in Love* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2016), 10.

²⁰ Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon, *Resident Aliens: A Provocative Christian Assessment of Culture and Ministry for People Who Know That Something is Wrong* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2014), 48.

even for followers of Christ. This idolatry must be surrendered at the cross of Jesus so that allegiance to any country or political system does not take hold of our hearts, govern our attitudes, or keep us from faithfully participating in the mission of God.

Our primary allegiance as Christians must be to Christ alone and not to a certain country or political system. The values of the kingdom of God stand in sharp contrast to the prevailing political stance that shouts “America first! America first!” and “opens up the question of idolatry—whether a country is being accorded the place that belongs to God alone.”²¹ When we are busy shouting “America first” we can’t also then be working towards God’s kingdom to be “first.” God’s kingdom calls for prosperity of a different kind, it is about the creation of a holy people. Stone reminds us, “God’s purpose in history is not just the creation of holy individuals but the creation of a holy people, a people whose very existence in the world is a living testimony to the rule of God. Holiness, therefore, is unreservedly social, political, and economic.”²² God’s holiness on display through the church should affect all spheres of human life, including the political system.

When our primary allegiance is to Christ, then we can detach the social issues that we should speak into as Christians from the hijacking that a certain political party has had upon them. Quite often what we find in churches is that our stance on those issues and the way we treat people in those situations, lines up more with the political party that we affiliate with, than with what we see reflected in Scripture as the heart of God for all people. When we view people primarily through the lens of a political affiliation and not through the lens of the kingdom, we can be sure idolatry has done its worst. Political systems are

²¹ Kenneth Ross, “Brexit, Trump, and Christ’s Call to Discipleship,” *International Review of Mission* 106, no. 2 (December 2017): 373.

²² Bryan Stone, *Evangelism after Christendom: The Theology and Practice of Christian Witness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2007), 70.

often unjust and discriminate against people who do not hold their same positions. Therefore, trying to define Christianity through the lens of these faulty systems is a problem for the church in the United States today. Yet, lest we forget, “the church does not attack the powers; this Christ has done. The church concentrates upon not being seduced by them.”²³ Our primary allegiance as Christians must be to Christ alone and not to a certain country or political system.

An important demonstration of divided loyalty is the church’s response to immigration policy in recent years. In my ministry context, the problem of undocumented residents instantiates the problem of divided loyalties. I have often found myself faced with some version of the following situation: a person in church asks for prayer because they heard ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) is doing random checks on the highway. In the form of a prayer request they warn others with undocumented status that there is reason to fear and to exert great caution. Stories follow of the horrors of being detained, of being treated like criminals, put in jail, and after months of sitting in a jail cell, finally, being deported with only the clothes on their backs to a country that is now as foreign to them as it once had been home. So how do we pray in this situation? If a political party is our idol, we really cannot do it effectively. On one extreme we would use the prayer platform to attack those who are against immigration reform and to cast judgement on the other party for not caring for justice and not having compassion; and on the other hand, we would pray for effective closing of borders, for all undocumented workers to be deported, and for people to obey the laws. However, when Jesus is Lord and no political party is

²³ Ibid., 123.

idolized, it opens the possibility for even the hardest of social issues to be addressed with a heart of compassion and love.

We know that the issue of immigration in the United States raises many questions about national identity, economics, foreign policy, security, justice, and many other related issues. However, we should discern it faithfully via the lens of God's kingdom. The immigration issue is what allows for monocultural churches to remain the norm in the Nazarene church. Since many people of varying cultures have entered the United States without the proper documentation, it would require great humility and courage from all (those with legal documents and those without them) to attend the same church, and furthermore, for church leaders to create spaces for fellowship, story sharing, and friendships to grow. Idolizing a political party would never make space for this; rather, it calls for dehumanization of people so that entire groups can be dismissed as less than, not important, or threats. This type of fear and rejection of course is the opposite of Christian hospitality, and at the root is unfaithfulness to sound ecclesiology. Sound ecclesiology teaches us that the way of Christ is hard, uncomfortable, and inconvenient. Christ extended empathy, care, and respect to others, regardless of who the politicians or religious systems of his time considered worthy. Unfaithfulness to sound ecclesiology has allowed for the American way to prevail against the Christian way and thus created the idol of politics in the church today.

Idolizing a political party stands in direct opposition to the values of the gospel of Christ and serves to inhibit a sense of welcome and belonging in the church. Contrary to what many Christians believe, following the way of Christ is not about blindly adopting a certain political position, voting for a certain candidate, or even primarily about protesting

injustice or advocating certain ethical points. “The church is not to be judged by how useful we are as a ‘supportive institution’ and our clergy as members of a ‘helping profession’. The church has its own reason for being, hid within its own mandate and not found in the world. We are not chartered by the Emperor.”²⁴ The topic of immigration is important and forces us to grapple with the question: if immigrants/strangers are not welcome in the church, then what God are we really following? The church is the place where we continuously teach Christians what it is to be “aliens” in a land not quite home. We must remember that “how we deal with current issues such as immigration, crime and punishment, poverty, and race become important markers as to whether or not we value diversity as actuality rather than ideology.”²⁵ When Jesus is Lord and politics are not, issues such as immigration serve as opportunities to examine the unique worth of all persons and to dethrone any possible contrary allegiances of nationalism. We learn that “to turn away or to treat badly one made in the image of God is a violation against God himself”²⁶ and we begin to confess and reorient our ways to the way of Christ. Ultimately, discipleship is about following Jesus, whose way of life is subversive to culture. “Being disciples will mean countering the all-consuming claims of populist politics with the confession that Jesus is Lord. To do so is likely to be costly.”²⁷ We must be willing to pay the price to follow the subversive way of Christ.

In this section we have called out the sin of political idolatry that can easily find its way into the church; this is seen by way of divided loyalties that guide the way we respond

²⁴ Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, 39.

²⁵ Susan Carole, *Community Mosaic: Competencies for Multicultural Ministry* (Kansas City, MO: Nazarene Publishing House, 2018), 91.

²⁶ M. Daniel Carroll, “The Bible, the Church, and Human Rights in Contemporary Debates about Hispanic Immigration in the United States.” *Latin American Theology* 2, no. 1 (2006): 177.

²⁷ Ross, “Brexit, Trump, and Christ’s Call to Discipleship,” 373.

to certain issues. Idolizing politics is contrary to the way of Christ. Following Christ in a lifestyle of discipleship invites us to emulate the hospitality of God. In Chapter 4 of this project we will demonstrate how an ecclesiology based on intentional hospitality begins to overthrow this idol and leads us to the confession that only Jesus is Lord. But before moving on we must address another sin that can be found in the church: a self-protection mentality.

The Sin of Self Protection

We have previously demonstrated that racism and political idolatry are sins that are inhospitable to the will and the way of God. When these are in play, they will lead the church to protect herself from anything that threatens those ideologies. When a church is in self-protection mode it acts defensively to guard oneself, one's property, or one's group, from feeling uncomfortable or threatened. Yet, comfort and self-preservation are not in the job description of the Christian church. In this section we will demonstrate that self-protection is contrary to God's mandate for the church.

A mentality of self-protection breeds an ecclesial culture that is contrary to the biblical teaching of what the church ought to be in the world. From Genesis to Revelation, Scripture offers a faithful narrative portraying God's love for all people and for diversity. In Genesis 11, we find the story of a people group who defiantly held to their homogeneity and refused to spread and fill the earth as God had commanded; "in so doing, they would stop the fulfillment of God's global and cultural command."²⁸ In response to this attempt by humanity to self-protect, God confused their languages and scattered the people and, "as a result, God's intended purpose for the spread and diversification of humanity and

²⁸ Brenda Salter McNeil and Rick Richardson, *The Heart of Racial Justice: How Soul Change Leads to Social Change* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2009), 36.

cultures would continue.”²⁹ Self-protection is a common thread we find in humanity’s response to God’s desire for diversity and inclusion; yet, as God’s people, we are called to offer opportunities for belonging and reconciliation to those around us. Jesus came offering others unconditional love, belonging, and reconciliation; His reconciling work “affects both the vertical plane and the horizontal plane.”³⁰ The cross accomplishes both reconciliation between sinners and God but also destroys the dividing wall of hostility that had separated Jew and Gentile (Ephesians 2:14). The church of Jesus Christ, therefore, is a subversive organism that is commissioned by God to fulfill God’s mission of transformation and reconciliation in the world. An ecclesiology that is focused on self-protection and that breeds racism and political idolatry is unbiblical and unfaithful to the mission of God.

A self-protection mentality in churches goes clear back to 313 AD, when Constantine issued an edict bringing about the “triumph” of Christianity in the West. “Constantinianism made it easy for the world to be Christian—and the church has been paying the price ever since.”³¹ The result of this history is a faulty ecclesiology that embraces cloistering and affirms shutting out those who are different; this has led to homogeneity and self-protection in the church. “Diversity in the church according to Scripture, is not merely good; it is essential. It is not something to be sought or tolerated; it is a reality we must obey and endeavor to preserve.”³² A self-protection mindset is one of the gravest problems in the church today, because it holds the church hostage so that she cannot faithfully participate in God’s mission.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Conde-Frazier, Kang, and Parrett, *A Many Colored Kingdom*, 56.

³¹ Ibid., 117-119.

³² Ibid., 76.

The church lives in the already/not yet tension—the pilgrimage between Pentecost and Christ’s return, which will be the fulfillment of His kingdom. However, many believers choose to lean further to the “not yet” side of our reality as kingdom people and abdicate their present role, purpose, and authority as the church. Overvaluing either the “already” or the “not yet” sides of the tension we live in as the church can obscure, on the one hand, the present missionary opportunities, and on the other, the certitude of hope that Christ will indeed return. “It is not too difficult to witness in recent Christian history in the United States how such a misappropriation and abdication have led the church to acquiesce its responsibility of proclaiming God’s shalom in the church and society, rendering itself useless and irrelevant.”³³ When we renounce the Holy Spirit’s power to truly make a difference in our generation we rob people of finding the wholeness and shalom that is offered by the kingdom of God and we settle for trying to find a comfortable existence in the world instead.

The church was always meant to be different than the world around her. In their provocative assessment of culture and ministry, Hauerwas and Willimon, assert that the church is God’s “social alternative.”³⁴ The church was never called to become too cozy with the world around her. Yet, at different points in her history, the church has been more concerned with self-preservation than staying faithful to her mission of reconciliation in the world; we know our scriptural mission of making disciples of all nations, but the temptation has always been to make ourselves at home in the world, follow its pattern, and

³³ Conde-Frazier, Kang, and Parrett, *A Many Colored Kingdom*, 214-215.

³⁴ Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon, *Resident Aliens: A Provocative Christian Assessment of Culture and Ministry for People Who Know That Something is Wrong* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2014), 18.

cloister ourselves off as a “separatist enclave.”³⁵ In his book, *Evangelism after Christendom: The Theology and Practice of Christian Witness*, Stone asserts, “What it means to be the people of God can never be something static, finished, fortresslike, or permanent. Indeed, exile and diaspora may very well be the ‘normal’ existence, even the vocation, of the people of God.”³⁶ The church must never remain in a place of comfort or safety. Self-protection is nowhere to be found in our missional mandate.

In this section, we have demonstrated that a self-protection mindset within the church is sinful because it is contrary to the call of God for the church which is a call to extend ourselves to all people groups and nations. We cannot remain faithful to God’s mission if we are busy trying to protect ourselves from the world. In the next section we move on to demonstrate that the root cause of the sinful practices we have previously discussed: racism, political idolatry, and self-protection, is unfaithfulness to sound ecclesiology.

The Root Problem: Unfaithfulness to Sound Ecclesiology

In the previous section we have demonstrated sinful practices in ecclesial life that are inhospitable to God and others and that harm God’s work in the world. In this section I argue that the root cause of these existing practices is unfaithfulness to our ecclesiology. Unfaithfulness to our ecclesiology has left the church powerless to fulfill her God-given mission in the world. Ecclesiology is the study of the “*ekklesia*”: those who have been called out by God to be a holy people and to reflect God’s heart to the world. A proper ecclesiology is a proper “understanding of the Christian Church in its varieties of forms

³⁵ Bryan Stone, *Evangelism after Christendom: The Theology and Practice of Christian Witness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2007), 115.

³⁶ Ibid.

and practices.”³⁷ Our participation in the theology and the practices of the church gives us the doctrines by which we will live out God’s mission in the world, as will be explored in subsequent chapters, and allows us to discover the purpose for the church. Unfaithfulness to ecclesiology occurs, however, when we view doctrines and Scripture incorrectly—and particularly the role of the church incorrectly—taking the focus off of God and God’s mission. When we live into a poor or faulty ecclesiology, theological sins take hold and can manifest as racism, political idolatry, and self-protection. These stand in sharp contrast to the ecclesiology we find in Scripture and that God desires to be at work in the church.

Our theological father, John Wesley, offers tremendous help when facing a faulty ecclesiology that is tempted towards sinful practices. A decline in faithful ecclesiology is not a novelty. Many books fill their pages with the theology of the Christian church, her mission, vitality, and decline. Oftentimes, John Wesley spoke about ecclesiology and asserted that the church was indeed in decline. In his assessment, the church was declining for three primary reasons. First, “the universality of the gospel, the embrace of the neighbor in holy love...was quickly marred by partiality and an incipient tribalism whereby particular groups preferred their *own* members not only to the detriment of others but also to the neglect of the entire community.”³⁸ Wesley understood how dangerous it was to the mission of God when churches preferred those who are like them to the detriment of others. In his estimation, this always “entailed subtle forms of idolatry in which some penultimate value (class, race, economic status, culture, language, or denomination) was made

³⁷ S. E. Brodd, “Ecclesiology,” in *Encyclopedia of Sciences and Religions*, edited by A. Runehov and L. Oviedo (New York, NY: Springer, Dordrecht, 2013), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-8265-8_343.

³⁸ Kenneth Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2007), 241.

ultimate.”³⁹ Second, Wesley believed that the effect of Constantine calling himself a Christian was detrimental to the church. He believed that the “power, riches, and honor that Constantine heaped on the church led not to its flourishing, as some had expected, but to its diminishment by undermining its integrity, call and very purpose.”⁴⁰ Third, Wesley believed that the “external factor of being favored by the state in both honor and power” had led to the church’s decline because she lost her peculiar understanding of humility.⁴¹

Since John Wesley is the theological father of the Nazarene church, we can assert that it was never expected that in our ecclesiological movement we would be inhospitable to others based on ethnicity, politics or any other factor. Rather, the extension of sacrificial and holy love to others was to be the norm. The understanding that the church would suffer to maintain her integrity at the hand of the political systems was always the expectation. Furthermore, Wesleyan ecclesiology called forth humility. There is no place for self-protection in Wesley’s understanding of the church. What we find rather is a rich history of humility upon which to build a faithful ecclesiology.

The church must be re-formed again by faithful and biblical ecclesiology—a correct understanding of who the church is and why she exists. John Wesley defined the church not simply as an institution but in terms of “flesh and blood people, members of the body of Christ who as a peculiar people are holy precisely because their Savior is holy.”⁴² Wesley believed the church to be a living organism animated by the Holy Spirit and primarily called to reflect holiness in the world. Because the task is massive and at odds with the culture that surrounds the church, Wesley believed that from time to time the

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 242-243.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., 240.

public church is “called to reform in light of the task of raising up a holy people who are animated by the love of God and neighbor.”⁴³ When the church is no longer aiming at reflecting God’s holy love, then “it has lost its way no matter what institutional or objective elements remain in place.”⁴⁴ As the church of the 21st century we must be willing to accept that we indeed have a problem and allow the Holy Spirit to re-form our ecclesiology (beliefs and/or practices).

Without an adequate ecclesiology of love and hospitality modelled and taught in local churches, we end up looking more like the culture of the world and less like the counter-cultural force Christ commissioned us to be. We end up being unfaithful to our Trinitarian (we will explore this in subsequent chapters) and Wesleyan ecclesiology, thus, more fully representing the self-centered systems of the world than the heart of God. The symptoms that arise from unfaithfulness to ecclesiology are racism, political idolatry, and a mindset of self-protection; they stand in contrast to the way of God and yet can be found in the average Nazarene church in the United States today. This is a massive problem that the church of Jesus must reckon with. In the next section we will share the proposal of this project which offers hospitality as a faithful and holistic approach to discipleship. This is indeed the vocation of the church.

Proposal: Hospitality as a Holistic Approach to Discipleship

As the previous sections have shown, the fundamental problem we are addressing is unfaithfulness to sound ecclesiology. I have shown that this problem manifests in local churches in the form of racism, political idolatry, and self-protection. This dissertation proposes that we can order the life of the church with a sound ecclesiology that is founded

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

on biblical hospitality. My deepest conviction is that to faithfully fulfill God's mission in the world we must individually, corporately, and intentionally embody God's hospitality. I am suggesting through the breadth of this research that intentional hospitality can become a holistic approach to discipleship that heals the unfaithfulness to sound ecclesiology present in the church today and that it will require orthodoxy: right belief (Chapter 3), orthopraxy: right practice (Chapter 4), and orthopathy: right experience (Chapter 5). This will begin to reframe for the church who we are and what we are called to.

Towards this effort, in this first Chapter, I have demonstrated that unfaithfulness to sound ecclesiology has taken root in many of our churches and manifested as racism, political idolatry, and self-protection. This is a major problem because it stands in contrast to the heart of God. Christian hospitality is a means God uses to bring health and healing to human beings, but unfaithfulness to sound ecclesiology is the culprit as to why inhospitable attitudes of racism, political idolatry and self-protection still exist in the church today. These must be uprooted because they are inhospitable to God and others, and they prevent us from becoming churches filled with disciples who faithfully reflect God's heart to the world.

Chapter 2 will serve as a road map that shows how we arrive at hospitality as the remedy to the problem of unfaithfulness to sound ecclesiology. Here, we interact with important voices and resources that offer discipleship models for the formation of Christlike disciples of Jesus, as well as review many ecclesiastical sources on hospitality. This chapter also outlines the three main ideas that make up this project: that hospitality is a biblically grounded tradition and faithful witness in church history; that the aim of discipleship is the formation of followers of Christ who are hospitable to God, self, and

others; and that holistic hospitality meets needs and inspires people to mission thus sustaining an ecclesial culture of hospitality.

In Chapter 3, we will focus our efforts on orthodoxy - on the biblical and historical tenets of hospitality that make it a necessary ecclesial foundation upon which to build the discipleship life of the church. In her book, *Formation in Faith*, Matthaëi says that “a congregational ministry of Christian faith formation rests on a culture of hospitality.”⁴⁵ Faithful ecclesial culture necessitates a culture of hospitality because it is biblically and historically sound. A church with a culture of hospitality is a radiant reflection of the love of Christ. This chapter will demonstrate that God’s very nature is hospitable, it defines hospitality and outlines hospitality in history. We will also learn the importance of hospitality in history, looking specifically at Benedictine spirituality. The early church was distinguished by the way they loved not just one another but even their enemies. Throughout the history of the Christian church, committed followers from every walk of life have responded to the call of God’s Spirit to sacrificially love others in the same way that God has loved them. This chapter demonstrates that hospitality is a strong and sound foundation upon which to build the ecclesial culture of a church because it is both an important part of our history and it is our vocation.

If Chapter 3 offers the orthodoxy of the model we are proposing, then Chapter 4 will offer the orthopraxy of such a model. Here we demonstrate that hospitality is a necessary approach to discipleship because the aim of discipleship is the formation of hospitable followers of Christ. Thus, we will see how a discipleship model based upon hospitality will allow for formative practices that help move the church from racism to

⁴⁵ Sondra Higgins Matthaëi, *Formation in Faith: The Congregational Ministry of Making Disciples* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2008), 2.

reconciliation, from idolatry to submitting to the Lordship of Jesus alone, and from self-protection to a lifestyle of hospitable discipleship.

In Chapter 5, we assert that a discipleship model based upon hospitality also offers orthopathy (right experience). A church that desires to live by a holistic hospitality model of discipleship will focus on various sociological, psychological, and spiritual needs that humans have. By providing for people the experience of having some of their needs cared for, they inspire them to join God's hospitable mission and, thus, sustain ecclesial culture. Only when people have encountered God's hospitality will they be able to embrace and embody it in the world. Local churches are "crucial settings for nurturing a life of hospitality."⁴⁶ It is in the nurturing of a common life that we teach and learn the important work of hospitality for Christian life and fellowship. We are all created as social beings with the need for community, belonging and safety. We need to be loved, heard, and develop a healthy self-esteem. We need spiritual friends and crave spiritual direction. The church is a place where those needs can be met, and people can flourish into all that God created them to be. "The church is commissioned as the organ of the Spirit to bring health and healing to our human lives and to the social order in which our lives are formed and molded."⁴⁷ Hospitality meets people's needs and then inspires them to mission.

Hospitality is a faithful model upon which to build the discipleship life of the church. Our discipleship mandate calls us to understand that every member of God's pilgrim people is to be "sent by God on an errand to love God's creation."⁴⁸ This requires that we participate with God's hospitable Spirit to create the kind of world where average

⁴⁶ Christine Pohl, "Hospitality, a practice and a way of life." *Vision* 3, no. 1 (Spring 2020): 38.

⁴⁷ Jones, Rufus. "Blessed Community." In *Called to Community: The Life Jesus Wants For His People*, edited by Frank Moore, 8. Walden, NY: Plough Publishing House, 2016.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 51.

people describe the Christians they know as “tenderhearted, merciful, kind, humble, gentle, patient, forgiving, not easily offended, and not begrudging” and where they know “what we stand for and what we believe in (instead of what we’re against).”⁴⁹ The church would be a more effective witness in the world today, if people saw the fruits of the Holy Spirit flowing from believers in this way. Local churches that foster a culture of hospitality are living this kingdom reality and are continuously inviting people to join them in a “pilgrimage in faith.”⁵⁰ This project will serve to demonstrate how this kingdom reality can become true for churches who long to reflect God in the world: it is by way of hospitality: a holistic approach to discipleship.

Conclusion

People seek out churches for various reasons, but primarily because of their need for God and their need for connection with others; they are longing for a place of belonging and safety in the midst of an inhospitable world. Yet eleven o’clock on Sunday morning can still be one of the loneliest hours; too many people longing for connection with God, and others leave our churches feeling as empty and disconnected as when they entered. This pervasive inhospitality can be seen in church foyers, in worship services, fellowship meals, Sunday school classes, and small groups. No one likes to hear the words, “We have a problem.” But unless we courageously look in the ecclesial mirror and admit our shortcomings, we will never be able to faithfully reflect the image of God to the world.

By and large, churches in America are struggling to reflect the values of the kingdom of God due to unfaithfulness to sound ecclesiology which has allowed the sins of

⁴⁹ Caleb Camp, *The Hospitality of God: Discovering and Living Kingdom Hospitality* (Bloomington, IN: WestBow Press, 2017), 89.

⁵⁰ Matthaei, *Formation in Faith*, 23.

racism, political idolatry, and self-protection to grow. This stands contrary to the character of God we find throughout the Old and New Testaments, who faithfully offers a place of belonging to all of creation. God wants the church to be a channel through which the deep human desire to belong can be fulfilled and a school where these virtues are learned. “Although we find joy and fulfillment in belonging to healthy and maturing churches, our end is something bigger: a witness to the world of the loving and just character of God and of the hope of belonging.”⁵¹ The way of Christ calls us to love God and others in new and radical ways. Our only hope for living into this call is to commit to being on this intentional journey together.

Up to this point in this project, I have demonstrated that racism, political idolatry, and self-protection exists in the church today and that the root cause of these practices is unfaithfulness to sound ecclesiology, and that these inhospitable attitudes counteract the church’s faithful witness in the world today. I have done these things cautiously and with the assurance that the One who has called us to be on mission will be on the frontlines, helping the church become the transformational source she was always meant to be. The aim of this project is to demonstrate that hospitality is a holistic approach to discipleship and that it is the answer we are seeking that corrects the unfaithfulness to sound ecclesiology that leads to racism, political idolatry and self-protection. A discipleship model founded upon Christian hospitality is the answer because it is a biblically and historically faithful model; the aim of discipleship is the formation of hospitable Christians; and it is upon receiving hospitality that people can be inspired to hospitable mission.

⁵¹ C. Christopher Smith, *How the Body of Christ Talks: Recovering the Practice of Conversation in the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2019), 10.

We are the church of Jesus Christ, and, as such, have already been empowered to be more than we currently are or even think is possible. With this assurance, we now move on to Chapter 2 where we will review some of the most relevant resources that speak to the importance of discipleship living and the place that biblical hospitality must have in the life of the church today for faithfulness to sound ecclesiology to be lived out.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW: FINDING THE PATH FORWARD

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate that hospitality is a well-researched solution to the problem of unfaithfulness to sound ecclesiology and to reveal the path that led me to assert that it is an important and necessary framework for living out biblical discipleship. Here we gather some of the voices that have influenced the creation of three key concepts that shape the heart of this entire project. These are: 1. that hospitality is foundational to our understanding of the Christian faith; 2. that the formation of hospitable Christians via belief and practice must be the aim of any discipleship ministry that desires to be true to sound ecclesiology; and 3. that an ecclesial culture of hospitality can be sustained when hospitable congregations meet people's needs, thus inspiring them to join God's mission in the world. This chapter demonstrates that holistic hospitality is well-researched and has the necessary authority to be the foundational piece to any discipleship model that desires to live out faithful ecclesiology and that there is need for such a model to be developed.

In Part One, we will look at sources that contribute to the biblical framework for hospitality and declare that recovering biblical hospitality is desperately needed in our day because it is transformational and corporately formative. Here, we will also discover that a Trinitarian ecclesiology is an ecclesiology of hospitality and a necessary framework for local churches today. In Part Two, we will assert that the formation of hospitable Christians is the aim of discipleship and begin to dismantle the inhospitable sins that are bred by racism and political idolatry. In Part Three, we will look at how a church that applies a discipleship model based on hospitality must be concerned about the sociological, psychological, and spiritual needs of her people for an ecclesial culture of hospitality to be sustained.

Part One: A Framework for Hospitality

In this section, we will see that hospitability is foundational to our understanding of the Christian faith because it is a biblically sound tradition, it has been an authentic witness throughout church history (particularly seen through Benedictine spirituality), and it calls the church out of unfaithful ecclesiology.

Hospitality in Scripture

In this section, we consider the current voices advocating hospitality as a biblically sound basis of ecclesial culture and practice. Chapter 3 will uncover some of the pertinent biblical texts in this regard. If faithfulness to sound ecclesiology is to take root, we must first understand the mission of God so that we can then understand the mission of the church. In the Old Testament, New Testament, and early monastic communities, mission was understood as hospitality. A dive into the biblical stories of Abraham, Rahab, Ruth, Elijah, Elisha, etc. shows how God's mission was accomplished in an environment of hospitality in each of those stories. "Israel was a light to the nations by welcoming the stranger to come and see the worship of Israel's God and to believe."⁵² God's mission is a mission of hospitality.

The ministry of Jesus was also movingly hospitable and inspires the church to a hospitable mission. Jesus dined with sinners, fed multitudes, spoke to women, performed miracles for people from all socio-economic classes, etc. Following Jesus's example, the early church accepted hospitality as their mission, too, and it became an important means by which they invited "new believers into the community."⁵³ Even the Eucharist embodies

⁵² Edward Smither, *Mission as Hospitality: Imitating the Hospitable God in Mission* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2021), 27.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 45.

hospitality because Jesus extended the table for people throughout his earthly ministry; the “Lord’s Table is a place for mission.”⁵⁴

Some churches would imagine their mission to be that of “conquering, winning, or even changing the world” but in reality, “mission is a joyfully relational endeavor of crossing boundaries between the already and not-yet people of God.”⁵⁵ The mission of God in Scripture often occurs through hospitality as God’s people encounter those not-yet part of the kingdom and—in hospitable environments—invite them to believe. The church must exchange the vision of winning and conquering people and, instead, move to a posture of offering profound welcome to the stranger and to imitate God’s hospitality in mission.

Hospitality, then, is not only the mission of the church but also the means by which we witness to the world. In his book, *Saved by Faith and Hospitality*, Jipp masterfully shows how extending hospitality to strangers and outcasts is consistent with the heart of biblical faith and witness. He provides both biblical exegesis and an analysis of the present situation in the American church. He argues passionately that the practice of hospitality is central to salvation and, therefore, necessary for Christians. He speaks against the temptation of Christians to build walls of fear and seek personal comfort. His message is urgent and necessary to draw the church back to follow in the footsteps of Jesus’s hospitality. Jipp’s argument is simple: “The God of the Christian Scriptures is a God of hospitality, a God who extends hospitality to his people and who requires that his people embody hospitality to others.”⁵⁶ His argument is simple to understand, yet so difficult to put into practice for the church of the 21st century who is tempted towards tribalism,

⁵⁴ Ibid., 79.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 127.

⁵⁶ Joshua Jipp, *Saved by Faith and Hospitality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2017), 2.

xenophobia, comfort, security, and greed. The church must embody faithful hospitality as a necessary and transformative practice that is a true witness to the world.

Hospitality was understood as mission and witness throughout the Bible and must be recovered in the 21st century American churches. In *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*, Pohl combines biblical and historical research and takes a contemporary look at communities of hospitality that are good guides and examples to follow in the journey of becoming like Jesus. Pohl's purpose in writing is to help Christians remember, reconsider, and recover hospitality. It is a necessary rediscovery if we ever hope to reflect God's true character to the world.⁵⁷ "God's guest list includes a disconcerting number of poor and broken people, those who appear to bring little to any gathering except their need." Offering generous welcome to the "least of these" without regard for what they can provide in return is a distinctive quality of Christian hospitality.⁵⁸ Offering this kind of hospitality reflects God's greater hospitality that "welcomes the undeserving, provides the lonely with a home, and sets a banquet table for the hungry."⁵⁹ People today are still hungry and are in desperate need of a hospitable church to love and welcome them; therefore, rediscovering the power and beauty of Christian hospitality has never been more necessary than it is today.

Hospitality is the mission of the church, the means by which we witness in the world, and a key practice that must be rediscovered in our churches today. But we cannot move forward without first taking a careful look at the best history has to offer us in the

⁵⁷ Christine Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999).

⁵⁸ Pohl, "Hospitality, a practice and a way of life", 16.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

area of hospitality. We now turn our attention to one man in early history that modeled hospitality particularly well and whose *Rule* still guides thousands of people in the world today, allowing them to engage more faithfully in divine hospitality. If thousands of people through several centuries have found St. Benedict a worthy guide, we too need to discover for ourselves if his ancient *Rule* holds hope for the church today.

Hospitality in Christian Tradition

Hospitality is a key tenet of Benedictine spirituality and offers hope for the church today. In Chapter 3 we will discuss the historical framework of Benedictine spirituality and we will interact with St. Benedict's Rule in seeking out contemporary application. The aim in this section is to demonstrate that many resources exist that cover the topic of Benedictine hospitality; these will show that hospitality is God's invitation, that hospitability is an act of worship, and that it is transformational and formative for the church today.

Hospitality as God's Invitation

In *Reaching for God: The Benedictine Oblate Way of Life*, Werner provides a tremendous resource for inexperienced travelers curious about how monastic life can intersect with life in the 21st century; she wants her readers to remember that Benedict's main invitation is to be open to God's invitation. Benedictine life is fueled by Scripture and prayer and an effort to "see and find God in each person and experience in daily life." Werner stresses that Benedict wrote this rule out of love and it was never meant to be "some harsh, unyielding dictum but an invitation to follow a prescribed path, to use a type of framework, a trellis structure through which you can grow to personal fulfillment and a

meaningful life.”⁶⁰ Throughout life we will consistently bump into God’s invitation to engage in hospitality.

Hospitality as Worship

Chittister describes hospitality as a form of worship. She believes Benedict is calling people to more than a handout or a courteous action but to a change of attitude and perspective that engages the deeper places of one’s life. She writes, “Benedict wants us to let down the barriers of our soul so that the God of the unexpected can come in.”⁶¹ In offering hospitality to God and others, we ourselves are transformed, thereby receiving even more than we bargained for. Particularly intriguing is Chittister’s idea that we must first be willing to offer hospitality to God before we can offer it to others. This leads to a concept of holistic hospitality that is more than just towards others; it is primarily towards God and then reflected to others.

Hospitality as Transformational

Robert Benson is another strong voice in Benedictine spirituality. His book, *A Good Neighbor: Benedict’s Guide to Community*, focuses on the second part of the Greatest Commandment—how we ought to love our neighbor. The context of his writing is the modern-day neighborhood, workspace, family structure, and the like. He invites readers to face the conflictions of our current way of life and interconnects the tenets of Benedictine spirituality to them. Benson invites readers to grapple with the call to community, humility, mercy, welcome, care, and living for others. His work is convicting and powerful; he

⁶⁰ Roberta Werner, *Reaching for God: The Benedictine Oblate Way of Life* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2013), 10.

⁶¹ Joan Chittister, *The Rule of Benedict: A Spirituality for the 21st Century* (New York, NY: Crossroad, 2010), 229.

writes: “Hospitable is a difficult posture if you cannot let go of your fears and hold out your hands. Opening your hands to receive anyone at all is impossible while your fists are holding on to your positions so tightly your knuckles have turned white.”⁶² Benson’s work is a poignant reminder of how difficult hospitality is even for believers; it requires so much inside of us to be transformed. His work leads to the idea that hospitality offered to God and others is also then hospitality to ourselves. When we engage in hospitable acts of kindness towards others, especially the feared other, we will find that we have offered ourselves the hard but hospitable opportunity to be transformed. Holistic hospitality, then, should include hospitality to God, self, and others.

In their work, *Radical Hospitality: Benedict’s Way of Love*, Homan and Pratt demonstrate that hospitality as an element of Christian spirituality can heal emotions such as fear, anger, and suspicion of others. They share monastic wisdom and intertwine it with powerful stories of lived experience. They describe the predicament of current spirituality as “tragically and poignantly adolescent” because it is simply seeking benefits and improvement for life but does not truly seek God and does not move us towards others in true and honest relationship. “It just keeps us running on the treadmill of our little egocentric worlds.”⁶³ What a bold description of the current state of spirituality that is accustomed to easy answers. This book is a response that says, “hospitality is not an easy answer. It requires that we take a chance and we change. It requires us to grow.”⁶⁴ Again,

⁶² Robert Benson, *A Good Neighbor: Benedict’s Guide to Community* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2009), 56.

⁶³ Lonni Pratt, *Radical Hospitality: Benedict’s Way of Love* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2011), 71

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 72.

we run in to the recurring theme that extending hospitality—whether to God or others—calls for a profound transformation in oneself.

Hospitality as Corporately Formative

Hospitality is not only something to be done on a personal level but also a practice that, when applied to a community of faith, will corporately shape, and form the church. Robinson, a Presbyterian pastor and Benedictine oblate, was particularly helpful in fusing ancient wisdom with practical church life. In *Ancient Paths: Discover Christian Formation the Benedictine Way*, Robinson asserts that he found “The Rule of St. Benedict to be a reliable guidebook for formation in the community of the local church.”⁶⁵ Though he states that there are many ways of spirituality, he believes that Benedictine formation is a lifelong and faithful path because it remains stable and obedient in community. Robinson points out that one of the most remarkable things about Benedictine spirituality is the view on hospitality that Benedict offered, sustained in monastic life, and that continues today. He says, “Benedict lived in a time of widespread societal distress and upheaval, and yet, he still called his monks to take the risk of welcoming the stranger ‘as Christ.’”⁶⁶ The call is for a new habit of the heart to be developed through intentional choices that are made daily about how we will spend our time, resources, and our very life.

Upon engaging with these resources, I found Benedictine tenets of hospitality to be beneficial for the problem of unfaithfulness to sound ecclesiology that breeds the inhospitable attitudes of racism, political idolatry, and self-protection that we see in the church today. They were a great reminder that hospitality is far more than we have made

⁶⁵ David Robinson, *Ancient Paths: Discover Christian Formation the Benedictine Way* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2010), xii.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 110.

it out to be. Hospitality is God's invitation to us, it is an act of worship, it is transformational, and it is a practice that has power to corporately form the church into a hospitable community. Throughout this research, I found this to be true: "part of the power of the Rule of Saint Benedict is its insistence on reminding us of what we already know to be true and yet somehow fail to keep in front of us as we go about our daily lives."⁶⁷ Christian hospitality is not hard to understand. It is, however, very difficult to live out. Yet, we do not have to fully recreate the wheel when it comes to hospitality; St. Benedict has proved to be a wise and experienced guide on this journey of faith that leads to a lifestyle of hospitality.

St. Benedict developed a biblically faithful ecclesiology for himself and his monks to live by, and hospitality was a key tenet to that ecclesiology. If we are to have a lasting and fruitful existence in the world, we too must grapple with faithfulness to biblically sound ecclesiology by which we feel God is calling us to live out God's mission in our community and context. To the intersection of ecclesiology and hospitality we now turn our attention.

Ecclesiology

In the previous chapter, we demonstrated that the American church is suffering primarily because of unfaithfulness to sound ecclesiology that breeds racism, political idolatry, and self-protection. A faithful study of ecclesiology helps us to understand the role of the church and our role in the church as followers of Christ. Embracing ecclesial practices where belonging and hospitality overthrow racism, political idolatry, and self-protection is an important and necessary step. The Church of the Nazarene already stands on Trinitarian ecclesiology, and this—at its most foundational level—is an ecclesiology of

⁶⁷ Benson, *A Good Neighbor*, 84.

hospitality. We move now to discuss two foundational pieces of our ecclesiology: the church as missionary and the church as a reflection of the Trinitarian God.

The Church as Missionary

The church does not have a mission in and of herself. It is “only as God uses the church as an instrument of his own missionary activity can the church’s act be properly considered mission.”⁶⁸ The reason this is so essential is because “without a sufficient account of God’s present action, mission collapses into the kind of theological problem so manifestly illustrated by the illegitimate liaison between Western colonialism and the missionary endeavor.”⁶⁹ What an important reminder as we move towards a solution that defeats racism, political idolatry, and self-protection. “God acts in the world and calls the church to parteciple in this act.”⁷⁰ So, then, the church does not have a mission per se; she is a missionary, she is the mission of God in the world. God is seeking to reconcile all things to Godself through Christ. The church is a visible reality of the new humanity created in Christ. Drawing people into this new humanity—that is, the church, the Body of Christ—is the mission of redemption, reconciliation, and renewal that extends to all of creation.

If the church “ceases to be missionary” we have not just failed in one of our tasks, we have “ceased being the Church.”⁷¹ The church “exists here and now as human beings determined by the promise of the Spirit, and takes the concrete form of liberation for missionary service.”⁷² As congregations that want to reflect God’s hospitable nature and

⁶⁸ John Fleet, *The Witness of God: The Trinity, Missio Dei, Karl Barth, and the Nature of Christian Community* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2010), 37.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 46-47.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 54.

⁷¹ Ibid., 73.

⁷² Ibid., 290.

properly affect the culture, we must always remember that the church achieves results with Christ but does not in and of herself effect them.

Trinitarian Ecclesiology

No doctrine is more relevant to our identity, calling, and work as the church today than the doctrine of the Trinity. The pattern of the Trinity (as will be demonstrated in Chapter 3) includes full equality, glad submission, mutual deference, and joyful intimacy. The Trinity is a community of deep love and hospitality. In his book, *Ministry in the Image of God*, Seamands convincingly declares that this, too, is the model that congregational life should take: “There is no place for disconnected lone rangers in ministry. If God is a communion of inseparably related persons, for us to exist as persons in ministry we must be in communion—in relationship—too.”⁷³ An ecclesiology founded upon the hospitality reflected in the Trinity will be imperative if we are fully to reflect the heart of God in our faith communities.

John Wesley’s ecclesiology was also Trinitarian in nature. “Wesleyan trinitarianism is, above all, gospel trinitarianism. The essence of salvation, according to Wesley, is “the happy and holy communion which the faithful have with the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost” (Sermon 77, “Spiritual Worship”).⁷⁴ Wesley thought “often about the nature of the church and its proper parameters as he considered his own ministry, his distinct call, of spreading scriptural holiness across the land.”⁷⁵ Wesley affirmed “the universality of the church that in its very essence as the redeemed community transcends a

⁷³ Stephen Seamands, *Ministry in the Image of God: The Trinitarian Shape of Christian Service* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 52.

⁷⁴ Fred Sanders, “John Wesley on Experiencing the Trinity,” *Seedbed*, February 10 2014, <https://www.seedbed.com/john-wesley-experiencing-trinity/>.

⁷⁵ Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley*, 238.

partisan and divisive spirit.”⁷⁶ Wesley reflected a generous and hospitable spirit when it came to ecclesiology, because his attention was the “inculcation of holy love among members of the body of Christ who may be confused or at times even mistaken in some of their beliefs.”⁷⁷ The offering of holy love and a lifestyle of hospitality are synonymous and cannot be separated. Wesley’s “Catholic Spirit” is one of the best examples of his hospitable openness to others.

What an ecclesiology we stand on as Nazarenes! From the very beginning the Wesleyan movement, contrary to the closedness of other groups, affirmed that there is room at the table for those who might believe differently. This hospitable and Trinitarian tenet of our Wesleyan tradition is important to hold onto as we deal with issues of racism, political idolatry, and self-protection. These inhospitable practices reflect a failure to lean into a sound, biblical, Trinitarian ecclesiology.

The previously aforementioned resources contribute towards a robust framework for hospitality. We found that the practice of hospitality needs to be rediscovered because it is biblically sound, and it calls the church to mission and authentic witness in the world today. It is a faithful guide because throughout church history it has stood the test of time, particularly as seen in Benedictine spirituality which shows us that: hospitality is God’s invitation, is an act of worship, is transformational, and is corporately formative. This research also took us into the topic of ecclesiology where we were reminded that the church’s task is to be on mission with God in the world and that God’s Trinitarian nature is a model for how congregational life should be lived out. An ecclesiology praxis based on hospitality must be embraced in order to correct the unfaithfulness to sound

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 239.

ecclesiology that plagues the church and fosters racism, political idolatry, and a mindset of self-protection.

In all my research, I did not find a discipleship model that is focused on tenets of holistic hospitality which I believe is the way forward towards a deeper embodiment of who we are called to be as followers of Christ. With this basis, we now move to engage the intersection between discipleship and hospitality.

Part Two: Hospitality as the Aim of Discipleship

In the previous section we saw that hospitality is a necessary foundation upon which to build ecclesial culture because it is a biblically sound tradition, it has been an authentic witness throughout church history, and it offers a corrective to faulty ecclesiology. The aim of this section is to demonstrate that hospitality is the aim of discipleship. In other words, the goal of discipleship is to demonstrate God's hospitality to humankind through our own ecclesial culture and practice. To do that, we will define discipleship, look at common discipleship models, find how faith formation and hospitality intersect, and once again call out the inhospitable sins of racism and political idolatry. We will arrive at the conclusion that hospitality is the aim of discipleship and can help correct the unfaithfulness to sound ecclesiology that plagues many American churches today.

Discipleship Defined

In architecture, a folly is a building that was constructed primarily for decoration but serving no other purpose. Throughout history, particularly during times of famine, many follies were built to provide employment for peasants or unemployed artists; but the building itself often lacked any practical purpose. I wonder if a harsh critique of our American churches today would say that we have employed a similar practice. We have

buildings—many large enough to hold hundreds of people at a time—but, by and large, almost every church is struggling to get people in, denominational groups in the United States are declining, and the group known as religious “nones” is rapidly growing.⁷⁸ So, in an effort to feel effective, we have busied our members with programs and activities but forgotten the purpose for existing. We are building but have forgotten the reason for building. Such forgetting has led to shaky ecclesiology—a faulty understanding of who the church is and why she exists—which in turn leads to poor ecclesial practices, as seen in Chapter 1. To remedy this, we must be intentional in our purpose and mission. Building—whether that be physical structures, programs, or church membership—with no real purpose will only continue to leave our members famished and longing for the true and authentic discipleship life that Jesus offers. There are no quick fixes to this either. We must be intentional about creating a discipleship model that helps our leaders and members understand what the end goal is and to know the reasons behind our mission. To do this, we must first define what we mean by discipleship.

A working definition of discipleship is important if we hope to become all that God has called us to be as individuals and as congregations. Barna, who is a leading expert in the topic of discipleship and hailed “the most quoted person in the Christian Church today”, offers helpful research about the current state of discipleship in the church. He asserts that though most believers say their faith matters, only a “few invest much energy in the pursuit of spiritual growth.”⁷⁹ He describes several approaches that have failed at producing

⁷⁸ Gregory Smith, et al., “In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace: An update on America’s changing religious landscape,” Pew Research Forum, October 17, 2019, <https://www.pewforum.org/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/>.

⁷⁹ George Barna, *Growing True Disciples: New Strategies for Producing Genuine Followers of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook Press, 2001), 33.

Christlike disciples. The first approach he mentions is “trying to produce disciples without first having a clear, crisp, and compelling definition of discipleship.”⁸⁰ Discipleship is a key concept that is spoken about or desired in most churches. However, if you were to ask fifteen Christians to define the word, you would be sure to get fifteen different answers. Discipleship simply stated means different things to different people. For some it means being connected to a Sunday school class. For some it is the course offered to new believers. For some it is a small group concept. And for others it means a weekly gathering that takes place usually at someone’s home. But the sad truth is that, as Petersen states in his book *Lifestyle Discipleship*, “forty years of discipleship programs and we are not disciplined.”⁸¹ There is a serious disconnect between what we say we believe about Jesus and how we live our lives in most 21st century American churches. N. T. Wright states it this way: “plenty of people in the church and outside it have made up a ‘Jesus’ for themselves, and have found that this invented character makes few demands on them. He makes them feel happy from time to time but doesn’t challenge them, doesn’t suggest they get up and do something about the plight of the world. Which is of course, what the real Jesus had an uncomfortable habit of doing.”⁸² To follow the true Jesus is to enter into a lifestyle of discipleship where the disciple who is founded in Christ is being built up in Him and through Him for the sake of the world. In the following section, Bonhoeffer, Wright, and Smith will help demonstrate that to be a disciple of Christ requires answering

⁸⁰ Ibid., 119.

⁸¹ Jim Petersen, *Lifestyle Discipleship: Encouraging Others to Spiritual Maturity* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1993), 15.

⁸² N. T. Wright, *Following Jesus: Biblical Reflections on Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1994), xiv.

the call to enter a peculiar way of life that requires constant obedience, sacrifice, and that leads to holiness.

Following Christ is a costly endeavor that requires obedience, sacrifice and surrender. Dietrich Bonhoeffer is considered one of the most important theologians of the 20th century because of the way he lived and died as a Christian. We look to him to help us define and understand the call to Christian discipleship. In his compelling book, *The Cost of Discipleship*, Bonhoeffer offers great insight into what it means to live out the gospel in everyday life. He sets up an important dichotomy between “cheap grace”—grace without discipleship—and “costly grace”—grace that costs a person his or her life.⁸³ Though his context was vastly different than mine as a pastor of a 21st century American church, his words still ring true: “only the man who is dead to his own will can follow Christ.”⁸⁴ Obedience presents believers with hard challenges. As we soon find out, “when Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.”⁸⁵ Jesus’s call to die to selfishness and sin cuts deep and brings about suffering to the young believer who, perhaps like the rich young ruler in the Gospels, wants to have the benefits of eternal life but not pay the price. This young man was after cheap grace: “grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.”⁸⁶ Obedience to Christ is costly and it is sure to bring about suffering. I would summarize Bonhoeffer’s definition of discipleship as a lifelong call to self-sacrifice, surrender, and obedience to Christ. Any solution that is to be proposed for the problem of unfaithfulness to sound ecclesiology will need to include these components because they are biblical, honest, and courageous.

⁸³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York, NY: SCM Press, 1959), 45.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 90.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 89.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 45.

Following Christ will also require a certain kind of death in the life of a believer. In his book, *Following Jesus: Biblical Reflections on Discipleship*, N.T. Wright—one of the most highly respected biblical scholars in the world today—shares about what following Jesus looks like in the here and now. This statement seems to summarize his work well: “‘Take up your cross,’ Jesus said; he invites us to a great act of faith and trust, to look with a clear eye at the moral choices we face and to be prepared to say ‘no’, even if it really hurts, when faced with subtle and powerful temptations. In the sight of the foolish, such behavior seems to be death; but we will be at peace.”⁸⁷ Christian discipleship requires rendering our ultimate allegiance to the suffering Christ, and it is “therefore not at all surprising that Christians should be called upon to suffer.”⁸⁸ Discipleship for the believer will lead to death—death to self and/or literal death in some cases—and deep surrender. Yet, for a Christian suffering is in fact “a joy and a token of his grace.”⁸⁹ Bonhoeffer believed that “Jesus asks nothing of us without giving us the strength to perform it. His commandment never seeks to destroy life, but to foster, strengthen and heal it.”⁹⁰ This life of discipleship with Jesus is “hard, unutterably hard, for those who try to resist it. But for those who willingly submit, the yoke is easy, and the burden is light.”⁹¹ Nothing about this discipleship journey with Christ is going to be easy or convenient. Discipleship is not merely about what we do, it is about who we are becoming—more and more like Jesus.

⁸⁷ N. T. Wright, *Following Jesus: Biblical Reflections on Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1994), 119.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 91.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 38.

⁹¹ Ibid., 37.

Following Jesus also requires that we take on a peculiar way of living. We find this best demonstrated in *Discipleship in the Present Tense: Reflections on Faith and Culture*, where James Smith speaks about a lifestyle of peculiarity that is important if we are to be faithful disciples of Jesus. He asserts that Christians are to be like the children of immigrants, who “might sometimes be embarrassed by our peculiarity: our inability to fit in, our sense of not being *quite* at home anywhere, all the ways our family ‘stands out’ as strange. We might be eager to assimilate, to look like others, to mimic the local dialect, to erase our peculiarity.”⁹² But he arrives at the conclusion that “peculiarity is prized in Scripture”; he asserts that “it is almost a synonym for holiness.”⁹³ Due to his contributions, my definition of discipleship, from here on out, includes peculiarity. Again, his work builds on a similar foundation as did the others—that this call to follow Jesus will be costly and overtake our whole life.

This section has shown the importance of a clear definition of discipleship. With the help of Bonhoeffer, Wright, and Smith we developed a working definition of discipleship that corroborates the scriptural basis for such a definition. Discipleship will hereon be defined as: responding to the call to follow Christ into a lifestyle of peculiarity that requires obedience, sacrifice, and death but leads to holiness. We understand that the journey will be long and costly. Yet, it is human nature to want to fix things quickly and to get discouraged and settle for easy answers when the changes we want to see do not happen at a rapid pace. But surrendering to a peculiar way of life, learning obedience and sacrifice, and living a life of holiness do not happen quickly, and we should not expect them to

⁹² James K. A. Smith, *Discipleship in the Present Tense: Reflections on Faith and Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Calvin College Press, 2013), 24.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 24-25.

because the “path of discipleship is a life-long journey of growth and maturing.”⁹⁴ We should never expect to fully arrive on this side of heaven. Rather, we should expect to always be growing in our discipleship life with Christ. In the section that follows, we evaluate a range of discipleship models in light of these findings in the hopes of encountering a model that calls for faithful discipleship and at the same time helps shift ecclesial culture into one that emulates the hospitable nature of God.

Discipleship Models

In the previous section discipleship was shown to be a journey that leads to peculiarity, obedience, sacrifice/death, and holiness. But in an attempt to circumvent the arduous discipleship process, many churches have made discipleship a means to an end. Rather than understanding discipleship as becoming all that God has called us to be as individuals and as congregations, it is viewed as a “method” or a particular way of growing. We want bigger churches, healthier people, success as a religion, etc.; and so often we have employed discipleship programs with the hopes that our churches would explode in number as many discipleship programs promise. However, the call of the church is to “abandon its imperialistic dreams on the one hand, and its passive noninvolvement on the other, and to become for the world what Jesus was for the world.”⁹⁵ That is what discipleship—following Jesus—really means and will accomplish. Bringing in discipleship programs for the sake of fixing or growing the church will not work. These might be outcomes of an intentional discipleship system, but the primary purpose of discipleship is not to fix the church or bring about church growth. The purpose is to make Christlike disciples. An

⁹⁴ Junius Dotson, *Developing an Intentional Discipleship System: A Guide for Congregations* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003), 5.

⁹⁵ Wright, *Following Jesus*, 51.

intentional discipleship model that understands the clear call to a peculiar way of life is one that follows Christ into obedience, sacrifice, and a life of holiness, brings clarity to a church's ecclesiology, and offers the principles via which a church will participate in discipleship. Such a system can inspire passion for making disciples among the leaders and laity of a local church.

In the models explored below we use this definition as a metric in the search for a model that would serve to disciple followers of Christ and shift ecclesial culture to reflect the hospitable heart of God. We will notice that though discipleship must expand past a weekly event or church program into a lifestyle; most models that I found had to do with forming smaller groups where important biblical knowledge is taught and where believers had an opportunity to ask questions and begin to develop their faith in community. Since the inception of the church in the Book of Acts, we find that the transformational work of ministry and discipleship took place in small group settings. The early church met in homes and, in this way, sustained Christian community. Gathering in smaller groups or settings remains key for ministry today; it is “one of those fundamental things in life that cannot be surpassed by some new innovation.”⁹⁶ Ministry in small groups continues to be an important way that congregations develop and train disciples for the task of ministry and where ecclesial culture can be shaped. There are, however, several conceptual frameworks available when it comes to small group ministry. The models researched for the purposes of this project are: undefined model, one-size-fits-all model, means to numerical growth model, Bible storying model, and emotionally healthy model.

Undefined Model

⁹⁶ M. Scott Boren, *Leading Small Groups in the Way of Jesus* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2015), 10.

One model that is used in several churches for faith formation is what I would call the undefined model. In this model, individuals in a congregation have freedom to begin any group within the church for whatever purpose they deem worthy. There is no structure that guides or gives oversight to such a group, or that makes sure that they meet the standards of a particular discipleship definition or ecclesiology. In essence leaders of these groups can choose their own purpose for existence. Though we want leaders to step up and be willing to lead small groups for faith formation, without a cohesive methodology, definition, or purpose, this model can lead to groups that become very disjointed. Groups that are not reflecting a greater mission can easily begin to adopt inhospitable attitudes, become cliquish, or even act contrary to the mission of the church as a whole. The downfall of this model is described in *Leading Small Groups in the Way of Jesus*.⁹⁷ Here, Boren describes the gravity of having groups within a church that are undefined and he warns, “we must examine what we are generating through all of this group activity.”⁹⁸ This model does not clearly call people to a lifestyle of peculiarity, obedience, suffering, or holiness; it is open ended and trusts people to find their own definition for discipleship. This model is inadequate for correcting unfaithfulness to sound ecclesiology because we cannot expect people to find their way into correct ecclesiology if it remains largely undefined. People have deep desires to connect in meaningful ways with other believers but churches that do not define for small group leaders what the discipleship framework and ecclesiology that they are aiming for is, will not faithfully form hospitable followers of Christ.

A discipleship model founded on holistic hospitality would provide a framework of beliefs, a Rule of Life by which small groups commit together to remain mindful to the

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 11.

call to extend hospitality to God, self, and others. This framework is something that would be taught on a regular basis to the leadership teams of the church so that it remains on the forefront of people's hearts and minds. People will only know what is expected and desired when we define what we believe the goal of faith formation to be.

One-Size-Fits-All Model

Another common framework for small group discipleship goes to the opposite extreme; in this model, small groups are a one-size-fits-all approach. A stringent model of discipleship is promoted as the only way to *truly* follow Jesus. It is best expressed in *Real-Life Discipleship: Building Churches that Make Disciples*.⁹⁹ This model has deep flaws because it does not take into consideration that every human person has a need to belong but that not everyone can belong in the same way. It does not allow space for diversity in the needs of people. This apparent inflexibility reveals the need for the development of a framework that understands that not all people will connect in the same way, and—in an effort to make all feel welcome—encourages different types of hospitable groups to emerge. Though this model clearly calls people to a lifestyle of obedience and sacrifice, it was so stringent that it felt inhospitable; I am concerned this model can eventually foster faulty ecclesiology that pushes people out rather than draws them in.

A discipleship model founded on holistic hospitality is not so stringent that it would make people feel unwelcome or forced into a certain mold. Rather, it invites leadership to remain open to the needs of people and consistently form groups that will invite people to join the journey of discipleship in ways that also fill personal needs. These groups can revolve around shared needs for grief support, recovery, empty-nesters, language, etc.

⁹⁹ Jim Putman, *Real-Life Discipleship: Building Churches That Make Disciples* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2010).

These hospitable groups will also produce faithful followers of Christ because the framework of hospitality for every group is the same, but a variety of groups offers people unique places to connect with God and others.

Means to Numerical Growth Model

Another model for small group ministry holds up numerical growth as the primary goal and purpose. In this model, small groups are believed to be the vehicle that will save the Church from her current decline—that will push the church to the next level of growth. This model is seen clearly in *New Perspectives on Breaking the 200 Barrier*.¹⁰⁰ Though growth might take place under this framework of ministry, it will not be sustainable or healthy. When growth, fruit, or success come before the call to follow Christ into peculiarity and holiness by way of obedience and sacrifice, we are walking on dangerous ground. This discipleship model is ultimately dangerous because it seems to miss the important truth that the church is a living organism that depends on the breath of the Holy Spirit for its survival and puts people before programs, like Christ modeled in His earthly ministry. A discipleship model founded on holistic hospitality is not primarily concerned with numbers. It offers hospitality first and foremost to the Spirit of God and believes that God is the one who grows the church.

Bible Storying Model

Two models stand out as extending hospitality to its members and allowing for a more holistic approach to discipleship. The first is the discipleship model known as “Bible storying.” In this model, within the safe setting of a small group, followers of Christ are invited to retell the stories of the faith and encouraged to share those same stories with

¹⁰⁰ Bill Sullivan, *New Perspectives on Breaking the 200 Barrier* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2005).

family, friends, and co-workers throughout the week. This model is welcoming and asks the question: “What can we do to help God’s truth really stick?”¹⁰¹ This model is particularly friendly to our postmodern culture whose learning style preferences have changed. “The majority of the millennials, baby busters/gen Xers, and even many of the baby boomers clearly prefer to learn through spoken and visual means rather than the printed word.”¹⁰² Using the model of Bible storying leads to relational small groups and intentional disciple-making and is an easily reproducible process. However, the question remains of how unfaithfulness to sound ecclesiology can be corrected by Bible storying alone. It cannot without intentionally calling people to a sacrificial lifestyle of discipleship and hospitality. This is where a discipleship model founded on holistic hospitality is particularly important. It provides a framework that allows for people to not just learn biblical truths but also communicates who we are to become: a people shaped by divine hospitality.

Emotionally Healthy Model

The second model I particularly appreciated is the model called “emotionally healthy discipleship.” This model is a holistic approach, one that calls for a change of lifestyle and involves not just the spiritual life but the emotional life as well. In this model, developed by Peter Scazzero and outlined in several of his books,¹⁰³ the disciple of Jesus

¹⁰¹ Avery Willis and Mark Snowden, *Truth that Sticks: How to Communicate Velcro Truth in a Teflon World* (Colorado Springs: CO: NavPress, 2010), 18.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Peter Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Church: A Strategy for Discipleship that Actually Changes Lives* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009). Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Discipleship: Moving from Shallow Christianity to Deep Transformation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2021). Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality: It’s Impossible to Be Spiritually Mature While Remaining Emotionally Immature* (Grand Rapids, MI: Harper Collins Publishers, 2006).

is invited to embark upon emotionally healthy spirituality that will allow them to move from shallow Christianity to deep transformation. This model contains potential for deep transformation in the individual. Although, Scazzero does not explicitly connect his approach to hospitality, emotionally healthy spirituality has profound implications for healthy ecclesial culture and practices. Emotionally unhealthy individuals and churches are unlikely to be genuinely hospitable. A discipleship model founded upon hospitality offers a holistic approach where disciples are called to consider the emotional implications of their faith journey, but it also provides participants with a clear understanding of what the end goal is: the formation of hospitable followers of Christ that extend hospitality to God, to self and to others. Unless believers understand the importance of emulating the hospitable heart of God in all relationships, we will not be forming holistic Christians that make a difference in our generation.

This section has identified the gaps in prevailing models of small group ministry. We looked at the undefined model and demonstrated that when a framework is undefined, groups will not understand or live into sound ecclesiology. We looked at a one size fits all model and determined that it was deeply inhospitable to the varying needs of people. We looked at a numerical growth model that exists for the purpose of growing the church and found it to be inhospitable to the Holy Spirit who is the only One who brings about growth in the church. We also looked at the Bible storying model that is hospitable but does not include an overarching framework of faithful ecclesiology. We looked at the emotionally healthy spirituality model that calls for the holistic approach to discipleship we have been seeking but does not connect it to hospitality which is necessary if we are to ever develop followers of Christ that reflect God in the world.

This research into current discipleship models helps us understand that the development of a framework for ecclesial culture that is hospitable to the Holy Spirit and that prioritizes people over programs is necessary for the formation of hospitable Christians. Through this process, we discovered that some discipleship models did not seem to have a good grasp on the aim of discipleship. Discipleship is not a program that we simply attend or participate in. It is a lifestyle we must undertake if we are to ever become a people of faith; we must become faithful and committed disciples of Jesus. When we as pastors and church leaders relegate our understanding of discipleship to simply an event or group people should participate in to further their biblical knowledge, we hinder people from becoming the Christlike followers they were created to be. When we invite people to participate in church life but don't emphasize the biblical need for transformation and sanctification, we simply produce religious people. The world doesn't need more religious people; God's invitation to a lifestyle of discipleship isn't a "mere matter of private piety, but...a call to people to stand up for the true God and his Servant Messiah, in the dangerous public arena of the real world."¹⁰⁴ God invites us to join God's hospitable mission as committed disciples. In the following section, we will turn our attention to the connection between discipleship and an ecclesial culture of hospitality. We will demonstrate that the aim of discipleship is a lifestyle that lives out sound ecclesiology—that embodies the hospitable heart and mission of God in the world today.

The Aim of Discipleship as a Lifestyle of Hospitality

Discipleship has been defined as responding to the call to follow Christ into a lifestyle of peculiarity that will require obedience, sacrifice, and death of selfishness and

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

that leads to holiness. Hospitality in previous sections has been described as the culture by which individuals and churches should be shaped based on sound doctrine and practice. In this section, we will show that the aim of discipleship is a lifestyle of hospitality. Here, key voices¹⁰⁵ in the area of discipleship will show that the journey of Christian formation (which is the process of becoming more and more like Jesus, a lifestyle of hospitality) requires various key aspects: an on-going commitment to developing the heart of God in each and every believer; understanding that kenotic ministry is what we are called to; recognizing that the Holy Spirit is at work in our spiritual formation; a commitment to be intentionally focused on the love of God and on the Holy Spirit; and discovering that God will form us in love by way of spiritual practices so that we can love and serve others. These aspects, together, describe holistic hospitality—to God, self, and others.

Discipleship requires an on-going commitment to allowing God to form and transform our hearts to reflect God's heart. In Nouwen's book, *Spiritual Formation: Following the Movements of the Spirit*, we find that "spiritual formation requires taking an inward journey to the heart,"¹⁰⁶ but also "the outward journey from the heart to community and ministry."¹⁰⁷ Spiritual formation is then something that requires a person to open their heart and reveal their deepest wounds and hurts in order to receive healing and freedom; spiritual formation includes inviting the Spirit of God to enter and bring about both personal and communal transformation. "This process of self-emptying and spirit filling is

¹⁰⁵ Matthaei, *Formation in Faith*; Henri Nouwen, Michael Christensen, and Rebecca Laird, *Spiritual Formation: Following the Movements of the Spirit* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishing, 2010); Andrew Root, *Faith Formation in a Secular Age: Responding to the Church's Obsession with Youthfulness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017); Andrew Root, *The Pastor in a Secular Age: Ministry to People Who No Longer Need a God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019); James K. A. Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2016), 188.

¹⁰⁶ Nouwen, Christensen, and Laird, *Spiritual Formation*, xix.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, xxvi.

called spiritual formation—the gradual development of the heart of God in the life of a human being, aided by contemplative prayer, inclusive community and compassionate ministry.”¹⁰⁸ Nouwen’s definition of spiritual formation as the ongoing development of the heart of God in a person shines a light upon something that could become an answer to the problem of unfaithfulness to sound ecclesiology. If followers of Christ developed the heart of God, then racism, political idolatry, and self-protection would not be obstacles to overcome in our churches. Nouwen goes on to offer movements that will allow the believer to reach out to their innermost self, to fellow human beings, and to God. Nouwen’s language opens the door for the development of a discipleship model that moves believers from hostility to hospitality. This model would include hospitality to God, self, and others and would need to be holistic, embracing the personal lives of individuals as well as the corporate life of the church.

A lifestyle of discipleship will lead followers of Christ to participate in kenotic ministry. In *Faith Formation in a Secular Age*, Root speaks of the culture’s obsession with authenticity and provides a vision of faith formation that is grounded in participation in Christ. He says, “it’s no wonder faith formation is hard for us; we’ve cut out the essential tissue of kenosis and by so doing have made the shape of divine action flat. And because it’s flat, it’s discardable.”¹⁰⁹ Over and over in his work, Root calls the church back to kenotic ministry even when it is not the hip or popular thing to do. “To be a minister is to be kenotic, self-emptying (not youthful, hip, or authentic). If it is not kenotic, then ministry is disconnected from the divine being and is something other than ministry.”¹¹⁰ This seems

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 5.

¹⁰⁹ Root, *Faith Formation in a Secular Age*, 163.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 166.

to speak directly to some of the discipleship models we previously described, which seek simple solutions to discipleship and church growth. A lifestyle of discipleship will require a self-emptying for the sake of Christ.

True transformation will not happen apart from divine encounters and faithful human response. In another of his works, Root states that for ministers struggling with how to lead the church in the secular age, “the temptation is to again push divine action to the background and attend to only immanent realities of a profession, wanting the pragmatic—what works!—over encounters with divine being itself.”¹¹¹ Root’s works are a powerful reminder that anything separated from the active work of God will not be right or sustainable to change the culture of a faith community into one that reflects the character and heart of God. It feels like an obvious thing; but, far too often, church leaders and pastors become obsessed with correcting the faults apparent in the church. In trying to correct them, we lean on our own ideologies, culture, and knowledge pushing God to the fringes of ministry that is supposed to be all about God and for God’s glory. Root’s work gives vision for how a local congregation needs to be particularly mindful to how we offer hospitality to God through prayer.

On the journey of discipleship, we must be intentional to focus on the love of God and dependence on God’s Spirit if we are to ever participate in the formation of healthy disciples of Christ. In her work, *Formation in Faith*, Matthaei challenges congregations to be intentional about the process of forming disciples. She teaches the importance of faithful discipleship that needs to be taught within the local church. Lack of intentionality when it comes to discipleship will lead both clergy and laity to disappointment as they would be

¹¹¹ Root, *The Pastor in a Secular Age*, 272.

unable to measure if a particular body of believers is being faithful to the call. Matthaei focuses formation in faith on God's love and the enabling work of the Holy Spirit. These two become important to this project as well, as any system that is developed to strengthen ecclesiology and shift the culture of a faith community into one that is hospitable will be intentionally based on God's love and dependence on God's Spirit. Matthaei brilliantly proposes that a congregational ministry of faith formation begins with hospitality; she describes it as: "willingness to hear each other's stories, to nurture our life together as a faithful community, and to cultivate authentic relationships with God and others that lead to deeper meaning in our lives."¹¹² Matthaei offers beginning blocks on which a local church can build in order to shift the culture into one that is more hospitable.

The journey of discipleship will also require intentional practices that focus on the love of God. James K. A. Smith is yet another important figure in the conversation of how we are formed as follower of Christ. In his book, *You Are What You Love*, he focuses on the spiritual power of habit. This work shows that though it is the honest desire of the church to shape culture, we are not always aware of the ways in which culture shapes us. In this work, Smith helps readers recognize the formative power of culture and the immense possibilities for transformation that Christian practices bring about. Smith asserts that the question "What do you love?" is indeed the most important question of our lives because we are shaped by what we love. His work offers ways that, as congregations, we can help people learn to love what they should. Yet, even in the task of loving, we need God's help. He shares a powerful image: "like the father of the prodigal son, God is already out ahead of us. He runs to the end of the lane to meet us where we are. He gives us the gifts of good

¹¹² Matthaei, *Formation in Faith*, 13-14.

rituals so we can practice loving him with heart, soul, mind, and strength. Thankfully, we pursue God *with* God. We love because he first loved us.”¹¹³ Smith’s work was a vivid reminder that God loves God’s church and will not give up on us. God will teach us to love God via spiritual practices.

This brief overview has shown a consensus that a culture of hospitality is the foundational aim of discipleship. Nouwen invites believers to a lifetime of offering hospitality to God by way of the ongoing journey of developing the heart of God. Root invites believers to hospitality by imitating God’s kenosis in Christian ministry. Matthaëi invites believers to accept God’s love and partner with the Holy Spirit in the formation of hospitable Christians. Smith’s work reminds us that God is ever present in the work and practices of ministry and will give us all that we need; this is reflective of God’s hospitality to the church. Many of these authors did not even use the word hospitality but that is what they are describing, which leads us again to the assertion that the aim of Christian discipleship is the formation of hospitable Christians.

The aim of discipleship is a lifestyle of hospitality. However, in order for the ecclesial culture and practice of hospitality to shape ecclesiology—that is the understanding of who the church is and why she exists—and correct the practice of self-protecting sins of racism and political idolatry, we must first repent from our sins and failures in these areas as the Christian church. To this we now move in the next section.

Repenting from Racism & Political Idolatry

The previous chapter showed that the church suffers from unfaithfulness to sound ecclesiology that propagates the self-protecting sins of racism and political idolatry. These

¹¹³ Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 188.

attitudes are inhospitable and do not reflect the heart of God in the world. In this section we will look at the vast research that validates the assertion that this inhospitality still exists in the church today and that calls the church to repentance, reconciliation, and hospitality.

The Inhospitable Sin of Racism

The church must repent from racism. Modern voices inside the church and outside of it are calling the church to repent from the self-protecting sin of racism that it has not only allowed but even perpetrated. One of the leading modern voices in antiracist teaching today is Robin DiAngelo. In her book, *White Fragility*,¹¹⁴ she brings to light the emotional structures that make discussions about racism very difficult. Her goal is societal change which she believes will come through meaningful cross-racial dialogue. Though her secular book and work are controversial in many Christian circles today, she says essentially what many Christian authors are saying as well—that racism is a problem that many people deny but that is still very present in society and needs to be brought to light so it can be shattered and so that societal change can take place. Christian voices such as John Perkins, Brenda McNeil, Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, and Susan Carole provide tremendous insight into how the Christian ought to respond to the effects of racism.

Two strong voices that call the church to repentance are Perkins and McNeil. They are good guides in this topic, both having experienced racism in the United States even from people who call themselves Christian. They speak with passion and compassion from their life experiences and offer creative solutions for Christians about how the body of Christ can rise to make a difference in present day challenges. Perkins challenges the church to “be the people of God and not just a collection of individual believers who gather

¹¹⁴ DiAngelo, *White Fragility*.

weekly for the convenience of joint worship on Sunday.”¹¹⁵ In these words, there is a call for a strong ecclesiology. Perkins believes that when individual Christians act on their own, they can justify their racism and bigotry, but if they are to really act as the people of God, then their actions will be different. As people called to re-present God in the world, we cannot respond with hate or ill will or prejudice towards any other person God created.

In similar fashion, McNeil challenges individual believers to connect to the great vision of God and God’s work in the world. She asserts that only in walking in mission with God will the journey transform us into “change agents who positively influence the society around us.”¹¹⁶ She, too, is calling the church to remember who she is and join the story of God rather than promoting a lesser story, be it our own or that of our culture, country, etc. Only in connecting to God’s ecclesiology will we be able to become change agents in the world.

After repentance comes the faithful work of reconciliation and this requires hospitality. *A Many Colored Kingdom*¹¹⁷ and *Community Mosaic*¹¹⁸ speak to the complexity of unfaithfulness to sound ecclesiology that leaves the body looking quite different than the Head of the church: Christ. They offer insights into multicultural ministry and the important work of reconciliation that the church can engage in. Both authors towards the end of their works talked about the important work of hospitality in correcting erroneous thinking and behaviors within the body of Christ. Conde-Frazier said it this way: “the first step in multicultural living is hospitality. It is a practice that brings us into close

¹¹⁵ John Perkins, *Let Justice Roll Down* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing, 1976), 197.

¹¹⁶ McNeil, *Roadmap to Reconciliation*, 125.

¹¹⁷ Conde-Frazier, Kang, and Parrett, *A Many Colored Kingdom*.

¹¹⁸ Carole, *Community Mosaic*.

alignment with the basic values of the kingdom.”¹¹⁹ Carole likewise says, “hospitality is necessary to build bridges between individuals of different cultures.”¹²⁰ She goes on to say that hospitality is one of those things that over time will “transform a congregation into a fellowship that welcomes different people from all walks of life.”¹²¹ Unfaithfulness to sound ecclesiology that breeds racism is corrected by way of hospitality.

These resources demonstrate that the sin of racism is still prevalent in the church today and they declare that repentance and reconciliation via hospitality are the remedy. Furthermore, they push us to understand that a framework of hospitality is the necessary foundation upon which to build the discipleship life of a church because it encompasses deep welcome and compassion and emulates the character of God in the world today.

Another prevalent sin in the church today that leads to inhospitality is political idolatry. To this topic we now turn our attention.

The Inhospitable Sin of Political Idolatry

Another sin, from which the church must repent, and which breeds inhospitable attitudes in Christian communities, is political idolatry. If we are to live out a faithful ecclesiology following the missionary God who calls and empowers a missionary church, our task then is simple and direct: to evangelize the world—to offer the good news of salvation to all people. However, as Stone demonstrates in *Evangelism After Christendom*, we now live in a time where “the notion of evangelizing is automatically connected to an attitude of intolerance and superiority towards others—a belligerent and one-sided attempt to convert others to our way of seeing things, with the necessary implications that those

¹¹⁹ Conde-Frazier, Kang, and Parrett, *A Many Colored Kingdom*, 171.

¹²⁰ Carole, *Community Mosaic*, 104.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 105.

who do not believe as we do are lost or in error.”¹²² How did we get so off track, to the place where evangelism—the means by which we share the good news—has become a dirty or embarrassing word? Stone’s answer lies herein: “societies where Christianity has historically been tied to the center of political, economic, and cultural power” produce churches that have given in to the temptation to “acquiesce to the world’s demand that the gospel be good news on the world’s own terms.”¹²³ Stone goes on to say that through repentance, humility, and dismissing the former advantages, the church can again regain her usefulness because “a church at the periphery of the world may yet be a church for the world.”¹²⁴ Political idolatry is the result of the church’s entanglement with the political systems of the world and it is a grave sin from which we must repent.

The church must repent from putting the politics of the cross aside and taking on the politics of nations. Stone calls out the church’s desire to make herself so comfortable in the systems of the world that she contradicts her faithful witness in the world. The question at hand is not whether the Christian should be political or not but rather to what politics is the Christian called. Stone will say it is to the politics of the cross that we are called. We must indeed seek the shalom of any the city that we find ourselves in (Jeremiah 29:7), but the church must always be “shaped by the politics of God’s reign rather than the politics of the city or nation in which it finds itself.”¹²⁵ Stone is very attentive to faulty ecclesiology that allows the church to become a pawn to any political system and provides historical examples of the dangers of such an ecclesiology.

¹²² Stone, *Evangelism after Christendom*, 10.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 11.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 179.

The church must repent from pursuing comfort and convenience rather than Christ. In their provocative book, *Resident Aliens*, Hauerwas and Willimon masterfully paint a picture of an ecclesiology that does not bow to the Empire; and they sharply critique the American church for utterly failing at being the prophetic alternative and becoming so cozy in the culture that they fail to transform it. “To be the church” is a phrase used repeatedly in this work, and to Hauerwas and Willimon it means that we are telling and living the story of Jesus Christ in our everyday lives. Like Stone, they face head-on the apostasy of Christendom and of a church that wants to be grafted into the Empire. They call the church to be a revolutionary community of love and hope.

God’s hospitality is powerful enough to forgive this grave sin and to heal the church. In *The Hospitality of God: Discovering and Living Kingdom Hospitality*, Camp walks followers of Jesus through the understanding of personal sin, lostness, and woundedness as strangers; he declares that it is God’s hospitality that takes us in, restores, and generously heals us. This kingdom hospitality we have received, he goes on to say, is what we are called to practice as the body of Christ in the world today. Interestingly, he ties the gift of divine hospitality with the shifting of paradigms. As God enters to dwell in us, God will unsettle our previous way of being and thinking, and we cannot fully engage in kingdom hospitality until there is a paradigm shift from our former way of thinking. He states, “when this happens, we can overcome our own worldviews, mindsets, and prejudices so we can live with a Kingdom perspective.”¹²⁶ A major shift in paradigm happens at the place of our previously held allegiances. He states, “I had to come to the realization that Jesus didn’t die on the cross to establish a political movement, to legislate

¹²⁶ Camp, *The Hospitality of God*, 60.

morals, or even to establish a religion. He never meant for Republican and Christian to become synonymous. He died to set people free.”¹²⁷ Holding to political allegiance over and above allegiance to Christ will lead us to marginalize groups of people and place them “outside the scope of the gospel in the name of politics and patriotism blended with the guise of religion.”¹²⁸ Camp shows the power of practicing divine hospitality once the paradigm shift has taken place. He believes that kingdom hospitality can allow followers of Christ to set aside their national, political, and even religious viewpoints in order to extend grace to all people. I fully agree with his assessment that “it is impossible to represent the Kingdom of heaven when we are so connected and devoted to the kingdoms of earth!”¹²⁹ God’s hospitality invites us to repent from political idolatry and gives us all we need as we journey forward towards an ecclesiology that embodies divine hospitality.

Political idolatry is a sin from which the church must repent, and which leads to an ecclesiology contrary to the discipleship mandate of Christ, as it seeks comfort in the ways of the world. However, in researching this topic, we discover that it is God’s hospitality that also provides forgiveness and healing from this sin and offers the correct ecclesiology by which to faithfully move forward. Faulty ecclesiology leads a church to find her mission entangled with the political and cultural systems of the world. Yet, we are called to affect those systems, not become entwined with them. The task of correcting unfaithfulness to sound ecclesiology is overwhelming, and yet, God refuses to give up on the church; even with her faults and failures, the church continues to be the vehicle God uses to show Godself to the world. What a massive but hopeful task we have before us; because God

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 72-73.

will not leave us to our own devices but will transform us to reflect God's glory to the world.

In Part Two, we have defined discipleship as a lifestyle of peculiar living that leads to obedience, sacrifice, and holiness. We have looked at common discipleship models and found two—"bible storying" and "emotionally healthy discipleship"—that could be modified to serve our purpose of developing Christlike disciples that embody divine hospitality. We looked at the topic of faith formation and determined that the aim of discipleship is the formation of hospitable Christians that emulate divine hospitality in the world. We then looked at the self-protecting sins of racism and political idolatry that still exist in the church today and determined that repentance is the first step in correcting these sins, this will lead us to reconciliation via hospitality. These sins hurt the community of faith and our witness in the world and must be uprooted by way of a discipleship framework modeled after divine hospitality; this framework is necessary to correct the faulty ecclesiology that these sins breed.

A discipleship model based on hospitality will require us to think through the specific ways hospitality must be applied in the local church in order for it to take root and become an effective agent for correcting the faulty ecclesiology that is prevalent in many churches today. Faithfully living out the mission of hospitality in Christian community is hard work. However, as followers of Christ, we must stay the course: "the answer lies in the hands of God's people. We need more than new structures. We need a spirit-filled life that is capable of combatting the corrosive ideologies of our age."¹³⁰ Only when the church lives out her call to embody hospitality is there hope for the world! When a church models

¹³⁰ Ibid., xvii.

holistic hospitality and meets important human needs it can then inspire people to join God's hospitable mission and offer God's hope to the world. In the following section we will unpack some sociological, psychological and spiritual needs that churches can intentionally meet and how by way of doing that they can inspire people to join God's hospitable mission in the world and sustain ecclesial culture.

Part Three: Holistic Hospitality as the Desired Ecclesial Culture

In the previous section, we asserted that holistic hospitality is the aim of discipleship and that a discipleship model founded on hospitality helps correct the faulty ecclesiology that plagues many American churches today. But hospitality must be taught and applied in the local church for it to become corrective. In this section, we will address the complexities of applying corporate hospitality, engage notions of holistic hospitality, and discuss the needs that hospitality can fill in the areas of sociology, psychology, and spirituality and how this inspires people to join God's hospitable mission.

The Complexities of Applying Corporate Hospitality

Hospitality must be taught and modeled in faith communities if we ever expect it to become the solution to unfaithfulness to sound ecclesiology that it can be. However, though there are a vast number of resources surrounding the theme of hospitality, few resources offer a practical way to begin to apply hospitality holistically. Many resources focus primarily on the biblical framework or the philosophy of hospitality, but few offer a true practical guide for how to enter the transformational discipline of hospitality by way of both a personal and a corporate commitment that would begin to engage the whole person and correct the faulty ecclesiology we have fallen prey to. The aim of this section

is to show that there is a gap in this area of study that necessitates the development of a framework for applying holistic hospitality in faith communities.

Nouwen offers the beginnings of holistic hospitality language (to God, self, and others) that are an important piece to any discipleship approach founded on hospitality. His writings offer a holistic approach to spiritual formation as he talks about movements of the spiritual life that lead us to reach out to our innermost self, to fellow human beings, and to God. This leads to the understanding that any discipleship model that could be set in place to intentionally live out a good ecclesiology needs to include this holistic approach, yet there remains a need to identify how a local congregation could embrace hospitality as mission and offer tangible ways for it to be applied corporately and personally. Unless it is applied in the life of the church it will not have lasting effect and correct faulty ecclesiology.

On the other hand, other resources, like Schnase's *Receiving God's Love: The Practice of Radical Hospitality*¹³¹ and his *Five Practices: Radical Hospitality*,¹³² offer practical help for churches wanting to be more hospitable. He broadens the view of hospitality and says that "hospitality is: prayer, work, habit, practice, initiative."¹³³ These practices in essence describe what we term hospitality to God and are a key piece to a holistic hospitality approach. But, yet again, in his writing there remains a need for a fuller holistic approach that profoundly affects both the personal life and the corporate life. Wilson is another voice in this important conversation. The approach modeled in his book

¹³¹ Robert Schnase, *Receiving God's Love: The Practice of Radical Hospitality* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2010).

¹³² Robert Schnase, *Five Practices: Radical Hospitality* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2008).

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 18.

*Hospitality, Service, Proclamation: Interfaith Engagement as Christian Discipleship*¹³⁴ focuses primarily on hospitality to others who are of different faith. He offers powerful examples of why this act of hospitality is needed in the world, yet it does not offer a holistic approach. In similar form and fashion, Smith, in his book, *How the Body of Christ Talks*,¹³⁵ teaches the church how to be present to one another. His book is not about hospitality but offers help to local congregations who want to engage in difficult conversations that could lead to healing. Perhaps nothing is more hospitable than listening to others well. Yet, again, his book does not grasp the concept of holistic hospitality.

Another helpful resource is *The Simplest Way to Change the World: Biblical Hospitality as a Way of Life*. This resource gets closer to offering a discipleship model based on tenets of hospitality that engage the individual in daily hospitality. However, it does not expand hospitality holistically: to God, self, and others. By and large, it focuses on hospitality to others through daily living. “The secret weapon for gospel advancement is hospitality, and you can practice it whether you live in a house, an apartment, a dorm, or a high-rise.”¹³⁶ Though this resource was inspiring and helpful, it does not address hospitality within the church structures or how our worship liturgies can be aimed towards developing a culture of hospitality; therefore, it does not offer solutions to correcting a faulty ecclesiology.

There are many great resources on practical hospitality from which to learn. However, I found a void in research in the area of holistic hospitality (to God, self, and

¹³⁴ Tom Wilson, *Hospitality, Service, Proclamation: Interfaith Engagement as Christian Discipleship* (London ECIY OTG, UK: SCM Press, 2019).

¹³⁵ Smith, *How the Body of Christ Talks*.

¹³⁶ Dustin Willis and Brandon Clements, *The Simplest Way to Change the World: Biblical Hospitality as a Way of Life* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2017), 19.

others) that is essential in helping believers live faithful lives as disciples of Christ. Building upon this beginning framework, in Chapter 4, this dissertation will propose a model that addresses the need for a holistic approach on the basis of hospitality: to God, self, and others; and that permeates what we do as believers within the church and outside of it. In Chapter 5 we will delve into some sociological, psychological and spiritual needs that humanity has, and propose hospitable practices that can help fill those needs. There was vast research in this area and to this we now turn our attention.

Practices of Hospitality that Meet Deep Human Needs

Holistic hospitality must be taught and experienced in the personal life of individuals, but also in the corporate life of the church. Unless this happens, holistic hospitality cannot properly remedy unfaithfulness to sound ecclesiology. Churches must focus on more than simply meeting the “spiritual” needs of people. Humans are not one-dimensional creatures; we are complex and interconnected in ways we have yet to fully understand. For years, churches have left the sociological and psychological needs of their members to other professional fields and have focused primarily on the “spiritual” needs of individuals. Yet, this has produced an unhealthy disconnect in individuals and the world at large. Since hospitality at its core seeks to fill the needs of people around them, we cannot expect individuals to fully become hospitable individuals if we solely focus on the spiritual needs of the individual and leave their other needs uncared for. We must extend hospitality to the sociological and psychological needs of individuals as well as we gather in worship services and small group settings. In this section we will show that a hospitable church that is intentional about meeting important sociological, psychological, and spiritual needs is modeling an ecclesial culture based on hospitality and sustaining said culture.

Sociological Needs

In this section, we turn to experts in the field of sociology, who teach us how to embody hospitality more faithfully to the whole person. A leading voice in the field of sociology is Brené Brown. Her global platform allows her to speak boldly about the needs of humanity that include vulnerability, love, belonging, and empathy. In her book, *Braving the Wilderness*,¹³⁷ she explores the need to belong and how people fill this need. Here she argues that humanity is experiencing a crisis of disconnection and offers practices that can lead to true belonging. She calls us to find our way back to ourselves and to each other if society is to flourish.

Another important voice that speaks to the sociological needs of people is Dr. Dean Ornish. In his book, *Love and Survival*, he gives the scientific basis for the healing power of intimacy. In a masterful way, he interconnects love and health and identifies love and intimacy as the most powerful healing forces that exist in the world. He offers practical wisdom about protecting health and enhancing wellness by paying attention to the real heart and its needs. He invites the reader to imagine “how intimate you would feel growing up in a family, in a village in which you were so fully seen, heard, and loved.”¹³⁸ I believe God has empowered the church by way of hospitality to be a community that sees, hears, and loves people fully.

Jan Holton is another voice that leads in sociological conversations that the church should tune in to. In her book, *Longing for Home*, she follows the crisis of forced displacement and offers a way for pastors and theological leaders to begin to engage with

¹³⁷ Brené Brown, *Braving the Wilderness: The Quest for True Belonging and the Courage to Stand Alone* (New York, NY: Random House, 2017).

¹³⁸ Dean Ornish, *Love & Survival: The Scientific Basis for the Healing Power of Intimacy* (New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 1997), 150.

the realities that people experience amidst chaos and crisis. With heart-wrenching stories, she teaches about homelessness, the refugee crisis, and immigration and how these needs can begin to be met via compassionate hospitality. Holton states that “belonging is fundamental to sustaining both spiritual and relational flourishing.”¹³⁹ If churches became places where true belonging could happen for people from all walks of life, we would make an immense impact in the kingdom of God.

Another important sociological resource comes from community activist Paul Born’s book, *Deepening Community*.¹⁴⁰ Here, he demonstrates how community shapes our identity and how it can quench the thirst for belonging and bolster physical, emotional, mental, and economic health in societies. He clearly demonstrates the problem of how, in our modern age, community ties are no longer felt, thus people are left feeling alone and fearful and grasping at shallow substitutes to true community. He offers four pillars that can strengthen community; they include: sharing stories, enjoying one another, taking care of others, and working together for a better world.

Listening to these experts in the field of sociology reminds us that the church is a prominent place where true community can naturally happen and where healing can take place. Churches that long to reflect God’s hospitality must pay special attention to the sociological needs of people to belong and feel safe. But humanity also has psychological needs to which the church should minister. To these needs and the church’s role in fulfilling them we now turn our attention.

¹³⁹ M. Jan Holton, *Longing for Home: Forced Displacement and Postures of Hospitality* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016), 37.

¹⁴⁰ Paul Born, *Deepening Community: Finding Joy Together in Chaotic Times* (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2014).

Psychological Needs

Turning for help to experts in other fields to gain greater insight for ministry work requires humility and the acknowledgment that God has given others wisdom that we should apply in church settings if we are to holistically love people and provide for their needs. Resources are vast in the field of psychology, but for the scope of this project we found three to be most significant. In an article titled, “Freudian Slips: Live Loved—The Psychology and Theology of Love,” Ruth McConnell shows how love is the intersection between the human and God. In looking at love through the lenses of psychology and theology, she explores both attachment theory and Trinitarian theology. She begins with what constitutes proper attachment and asserts that “...if we feel securely attached to someone, it provides a ‘secure base’ from which to explore the world.”¹⁴¹ Churches can become a secure base for people from which they can safely explore the faith. After all, proper attachment is an essential gift Jesus offers humanity. She concludes that “the gospel is not so much about you inviting Jesus into your heart, but about Jesus including you in his *deep secure attachment* relationship with the Father and the Spirit.”¹⁴² If places of worship became places where deep love and attachment could be fostered, we would be affecting not just the spiritual lives of people but also their psyche.

Dr. Henry Cloud is a prominent voice in the field of psychology. In his book, *Changes that Heal*,¹⁴³ he provides brilliant insights into the human soul and offers biblical

¹⁴¹ Ruth McConnell, “Freudian Slips: Live Loved – The Psychology and Theology of Love,” *The New Zealand Journal of Christian Thought & Practices* 20, no. 2 (July 2013): 2.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁴³ Henry Cloud, *Changes That Heal: How to Understand Your Past to Ensure a Healthier Future* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990).

approaches for how people can deal with personal pain and heal from their emotional wounds. This book also shows how to connect to other people in proper ways through bonding and healthy boundaries so that we can become whole people despite brokenness. Another resource, *Healing for Damaged Emotions*,¹⁴⁴ encourages individuals to learn to live compassionately with themselves by inviting the Holy Spirit to heal past woundedness. Seamands names the specific hurdles of guilt, poor self-esteem, and perfectionism as things that keep people from becoming all that God has created them to be. If churches were to pay special attention to how these areas are treated in church life and offer people resources for overcoming them, we would be offering great hospitality to our members and helping them then become hospitable followers of Jesus who are willing to meet the needs of others.

These resources offer compelling wisdom for any church leader who seeks to think holistically about the needs of humanity in order to begin to address them and form disciples of Jesus who are whole and experiencing healing. The church is a great place where the need to be loved, to be heard, and for self-esteem can be satisfied. Though we know we cannot separate the psyche from the spirit, for ages the church has left psychological needs to the counselors and psychologists. I believe it is high time that we engage more deeply in this field and offer people holistic hospitality; that is the way we will form hospitable disciples.

Besides sociological and psychological needs, all individuals have spiritual needs. There are two deeply spiritual needs that are often left untouched in people: the need for spiritual friendship and spiritual direction.

¹⁴⁴ David A. Seamands, *Healing for Damaged Emotions* (Colorado Springs, CO: Kingsway Communications, 2015).

Spiritual Needs

When it comes to the spiritual life of individuals, most church leaders may feel they have a good grasp on what they should offer to their members. We know to teach about prayer, worship, and service. However, as we dove into the vast amount of literature regarding the spiritual needs of individuals, we found that people have some important spiritual needs that are perhaps overlooked; these are the need for spiritual friendships and the need for spiritual direction. In Crabb's compelling book, *The Safest Place on Earth*,¹⁴⁵ he presents an inspiring vision of the church as a place where we learn what it means to be real in community and to reflect Christ. He believes that the only way to authentic and real community is to first learn how to extend true spiritual friendship to one another. For Crabb, "a central task of community is to create a place that is safe enough for the walls to be torn down, safe enough for each of us to own and reveal our brokenness. Only then can the power of connecting do its job. Only then then can community be used of God to restore our souls."¹⁴⁶ In the search for spiritual needs to be met, humanity longs for a few spiritual friends with whom to walk the journey of faith. Perhaps nothing that we offer in the church is more important than this. We are not meant to journey alone. Creating hospitable space within church life for people to find and develop spiritual friendships is key to growing healthy disciples that will emulate the hospitality of God in the world.

¹⁴⁵ Larry Crabb, *The Safest Place on Earth: Where People Connect and are Forever Changed* (Nashville, TN: W. Publishing Group, 1999).

¹⁴⁶ Larry Crabb, *Connecting: Healing Ourselves and Our Relationships* (Nashville, TN: W. Publishing Group, 1997), 11.

Another spiritual need that perhaps people do not know they have is the need for spiritual direction. Angela Reed does an incredible job of reminding church leaders of the ancient practice of spiritual guidance and its contemporary significance. Reed explores the genuine hunger that people have to encounter the divine and places spiritual direction squarely in the middle of congregational life. She believes it should be at the top of the list of ministry tasks that postmodern congregations must learn to develop. She says that “the church faces a great challenge as it seeks to understand and address the spiritual yearnings of those in the pews and those who have already turned toward the door.”¹⁴⁷ Reed offers hope by saying that the discipline of spiritual direction is transforming congregations across America and calls pastors and leaders to pay attention to the deepest needs of people and be willing to meet them. If the desire is for true spiritual growth in Christians that allows them to experience God in worship and in their relationship with each other, then we must be willing to offer space for practices like spiritual direction that can deeply transform a person via the honesty and hospitality offered by another.

In this section we have noted that the whole person is important not just the spiritual aspects of an individual. Churches that long to develop hospitable disciples that influence their communities and neighborhoods must be concerned about the sociological and psychological needs of individuals as well as their spiritual needs in ways that are perhaps neither conventional nor common. Practices of hospitality meet needs, so a hospitable church will find ways to meet the needs of people. When people’s needs have been met, they will then be able to offer to others what they have graciously received. Disciples who

¹⁴⁷ Angela Reed, *Quest for Spiritual Community: Reclaiming Spiritual Guidance for Contemporary Congregations* (New York, NY: T & T Clark, 2011), 5.

experience hospitality can then become hospitable followers of God and an ecclesial culture of hospitality can be sustained.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have explored many topics related to Christian living, of most importance: discipleship and hospitality. Discipleship is the call to follow Christ into a lifestyle of peculiarity, obedience, sacrifice, and holiness. However, we discovered that it is not enough to simply define discipleship or understand how it has been misunderstood or misused in recent years; in order for the ecclesiology of our churches to become faithful to the hospitable mission and character of God, the call to a lifestyle of hospitable discipleship must take hold of Christians personally and corporately. Hospitality is the culture we hope to emulate as disciples of Jesus. Through this process we found that holistic hospitality is a corrective to the problem of faulty ecclesiology and a necessary framework for living out faithful discipleship in the world today.

In Part One, we showed that hospitality has a strong biblical foundation upon which the church of the 21st century can build. Hospitality is reflected and encouraged from beginning to end in the Bible and has a strong historical foundation. Hospitality is a key tenet of Benedictine spirituality which invites us to grow our theological understanding to one that asserts that “all” people carry the presence of Christ innately within them. In Part Two, we determined that the formation of hospitable Christians is the aim of discipleship; the two should not be separated. If we do not keep the aim in mind by way of consistent teaching and practical application in the local church, we will not faithfully live out the

discipleship life to which Christ has called us. We also demonstrated that hospitality begins to dismantle the self-protecting sins of racism and political idolatry by way of repentance and reconciliation. In Part Three, we determined that holistic hospitality is essential for transforming both individuals and ecclesial culture. A church that hopes to truly form hospitable disciples will be concerned with the holistic needs of people: sociological, psychological, and spiritual. Once believers have experienced the transformational power of hospitality, they can emulate that hospitality in the world.

The research reflected in this chapter leads us to the important understanding that a discipleship model based on a framework of holistic hospitality can correct unfaithfulness to sound ecclesiology and produce hospitable disciples who reflect the heart of God in the world. Hospitality is a well-researched topic and has the necessary authority to be the foundational piece to any discipleship model that desires to live out faithful ecclesiology. Yet, in all of our research we did not find a discipleship model founded upon holistic hospitality for corporate ecclesial shifting of culture. In the following chapters we will more fully demonstrate that a discipleship model based upon hospitality can be a corrective to unfaithfulness to sound ecclesiology via orthodoxy (Chapter 3), orthopraxy (Chapter 4), and orthopathy (Chapter 5). In the following chapter, we will demonstrate that hospitality is a necessary foundation upon which to build a discipleship ministry because it is orthodox: biblically and historically faithful to the witness of God.

CHAPTER 3: THE BIBLICAL AND HISTORICAL FRAMEWORK OF HOSPITALITY

Introduction

In the previous chapter, we demonstrated that hospitality is central to the Christian life; it defines God's mission in the world, and it defines the mission of the church as well. What we find throughout the inspired pages of the biblical texts is that "God's hospitality in the loving gift of Christ to a broken and lost humanity created a people constituted by hospitality to one another, to stranger, and to the world."¹⁴⁸ We are a people who were created out of God's lavish hospitality and have thus been given the call to live out godly hospitality, even though it is overwhelmingly foreign in our culture and world today. Also, in researching Benedictine spirituality we found that hospitality is God's invitation to us, that it is an act of worship, that it can be transformational and that it is corporately formative. The previous chapter offered introductions to a biblical and historical understanding of hospitality. The focus of this chapter will be to further demonstrate that hospitality is a sound and necessary foundation upon which to build the discipleship ministry of a church because it is orthodox: faithful to Scripture and tradition.

In order to achieve this, in Part One, we will focus on the biblical framework for hospitality that shows us the very nature of God as hospitable; we will come to define Christian hospitality as the gift offered to believers through Christ that allows them to

¹⁴⁸ Jipp, *Saved by Faith and Hospitality*, 7.

receive guests and strangers with kind and open hearts, thus allowing them to offer sacrificial generosity of their time, talent, and treasure through the spirit of love; and we will look at key Scriptures that shape this understanding. In Part Two we will look to church tradition to gain a richer understanding of the historical framework for hospitality. We will focus particularly on Benedictine tenets of hospitality. Hospitality is an important and necessary framework for Christian living because it describes who God is at the core of God's being, and who we are called to be as we emulate the character of God. We move now to outline the vast framework of biblical hospitality.

Part One: Biblical Framework

Unfaithfulness to sound ecclesiology emerges when a church in her orthodoxy, orthopraxy, and/or orthopathy, is being unfaithful to the character of God. The aim of this section is to show that hospitality is an important biblical concept upon which we can build ecclesial culture in order to correct such unfaithfulness to ecclesiology. The framework of hospitality is orthodox as it is biblically sound and historically has provided faithful witness about God to the world. In order to begin to correct unfaithfulness to sound ecclesiology we must start from a place of right belief.

God's Hospitable Nature

In building a biblical framework for hospitality, we must begin with the doctrine of the Trinity. God's very nature points to a divine community of hospitality. The Triune God exists as One in the communion of three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Even their very names imply that they exist in relationship. "The Father is identified as the Father only by virtue of his relationship to the Son, and vice versa. The Spirit is Spirit by virtue of its interaction with the other two. To think of the trinitarian persons, then, is to think of

relations.”¹⁴⁹ God does not exist outside of this love relationship with Godself. The Gospel of John offers trinitarian language that helps us understand God’s hospitable nature. The book begins first by establishing the *equality* of the Father and the Son: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). We learn that the Son *submits* to the will of the Father and becomes flesh and lives among humans (John 1:14). Jesus lives his life *deferring* to the Father as he seeks to make the Father known, not himself (John 1:18). We see the close *intimacy* between the Father and the Son over and over again. “The Father loves the Son and has placed all things in his hands” (John 3:35).

We also see that the relationship with the Holy Spirit is based on *equality*. Jesus states that he will ask the Father and “he will give you another Advocate” (John 14:16); here, he does not mean “another different kind of Advocate, but another of the same kind, so that whatever Advocate Christ is, the Spirit is of the same essence.”¹⁵⁰ We also find that the Spirit *submits* to and *defers* to the Father and the Son because of the *intimacy of love* they share. We can take John 16:13-15 as an example: “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears.... He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine.” There is an inseparable bond of mutuality and hospitality that is core to the Triune God. “The perichoresis of the Trinity is more than just a simple dance (as it is too often defined) but is instead the “deepest form of presence and sharing.”¹⁵¹ This

¹⁴⁹ Seamands, *Ministry in the Image of God*, 34.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹⁵¹ Root, *Faith Formation in a Secular Age*, 158.

is the type of mutuality that the world needs to see reflected in the church today, and it is best reflected by way of Christian hospitality.

In John 17, we find a powerful prayer of Jesus for His present and future disciples. “I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (John 17:20-21). Clearly, Jesus desires for the church to embody the love between the Trinity. To make this a reality in the church today will require a culture of hospitality to be established so that we treat others as equals, submit to one another, enjoy intimacy of relationship, and defer to each other. The hospitality of love and mutuality that defines the Persons of the Trinity should guide our extension of God’s hospitality to all our relationships.

Any talk of Christian hospitality must be deeply grounded in the doctrine of the Trinity. There we find both our identity and our vocation as the church. The Triune God is hospitable and loving by nature, and that is the essence of what the church is called to be as well. With that foundation, we move now to define Christian hospitality.

Definition of Christian Hospitality

As we have previously mentioned, a substantial framework for Christian hospitality that reflects the character of God must include mutuality. Since all human beings bear the image of God, all should be treated with dignity and respect. The term mutuality provides a summative description of the internal relationship of the Godhead; and mutuality also serves as a substantial framework for Christian hospitality. Mutuality is enacted in Christian hospitality through sacrifice, generosity, kindness, openness, and love.

Biblical hospitality first requires the *sacrifice* of the very culture that has formed us as individuals. “When it comes to pursuing biblical hospitality as a way of life, we immediately happen upon a major obstacle; almost everything in our culture is set up to hinder us from pursuing it.”¹⁵² In order to pursue biblical hospitality, we must *generously sacrifice* our time, emotional space and energy, and our resources to build relationships with others. In the popular parable of the Good Samaritan found in Luke 10, the hero that Jesus portrays is the man who showed *kindness* and mercy to a stranger on the road. A truly hospitable person will emulate the mercy and *kindness* found in the heart of God who offers to humanity mercy and compassion time and again.

Hospitality also requires *openness* to others. It is not about grand gestures but about open hearts. “When I let a stranger into my heart, I let a new possibility approach me. When I reach past my own ideas, I begin to stretch myself open to the world, and this opening of my heart could change everything.”¹⁵³ The opening of our hearts leads to transformational hospitality because *openness* in hospitality leads to *love*. In Scripture, one of the key words for hospitality is the Greek word, *philoxenia*; which combines the general word for love or affection for people who are connected by kinship or faith (*phileo*), and the word for stranger (*xenos*). In her book, *Making Room*, Pohl asserts that “etymologically and practically, in the New Testament, hospitality is closely connected to love.”¹⁵⁴ Hospitality, then, is of utmost importance in the life of a believer, for the very gospel we proclaim is one of love. In his book, *The Wounded Healer*, Henri Nouwen discusses the hospitality required of a minister and offers this description: “...we can only love because we are born

¹⁵² Willis and Clements, *The Simplest Way to Change the World*, 30.

¹⁵³ Pratt, *Radical Hospitality*, 57.

¹⁵⁴ Pohl, *Making Room*, 31.

out of love, we can only give because our life is a gift, and we can only make others free because we are set free by Him whose heart is greater than ours.”¹⁵⁵ Thus hospitality must become more than something we do as followers of Christ; it must take hold of our deepest affections, thoughts, and actions and define who we are.

Biblical hospitality, then, is the gift offered to believers through Christ that allows them to receive guests and strangers with *kind* and *open* hearts, thus allowing them to offer *sacrificial generosity* of their time, talent, and treasure through the spirit of *love*. If these elements are lived out by individual Christians in their daily lives, it will pave the way for a culture of hospitality to define local congregations and allow for spaces that embody the kingdom of God where others are treated as equals, mutual submission is modeled, intimacy of relationship is enjoyed, and deferring to one another is practiced. This is an important and necessary aim of any discipleship ministry within a local body to produce Christ followers who emulate the hospitality of the Triune God.

Divine hospitality is seen throughout the whole of Scripture; and we will find that hospitality is not an optional practice for Christians, nor is it limited to those who feel they are particularly gifted for it. It is the call for all who are on walking the Way of Christ. Hospitality is foundational for any discipleship ministry that longs to be biblically faithful and reflect the heart of God.

Hospitality in Scripture

Hospitality is a divine characteristic that bookends the entire Bible. In Genesis 1, God displays generous hospitality by way of a beautiful home, the Garden of Eden. In Revelation 21, a new city coming down from the clouds, will be the final residing place for

¹⁵⁵ Henri Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1972), 91.

humanity. God is the greatest Host of all time. When, in Genesis 3, humanity rejects God's gracious hospitality, God tailors suitable clothes for Adam and Eve; and throughout the generations, we find God consistently initiating hospitality with creation. God's greatest gift of hospitality comes through Christ, who leaves heaven and comes to earth offering hospitality to others; inviting them to join Him in His eternal home. God displays radical hospitality again at Pentecost, whereby God's Holy Spirit now resides within the people of God.

Throughout the pages of Scripture, God's people are called to "re-present" God and be a hospitable people. God called Abram out of his homeland to become the one through whom God would bless all the families of the earth (Genesis 12). "In his old age Abraham is called by God to accept a new status that of a pilgrim, and to accept God not only as his guide but also as his host, the one who will supply his needs as he makes his journey into the unknown."¹⁵⁶ Abraham follows the hospitable God and learns to emulate Him. The earliest story in Scripture dealing with hospitality is the account of Abraham entertaining three men whom he later finds to be angels of the Lord (Genesis 18:1-15).

Many cultures in the ancient Eastern world recognized hospitality as a sacred duty, but what was distinctive of God's people was the "explicit legislation regarding the protection of and provision for the resident alien."¹⁵⁷ In Deuteronomy, God asks His people to show hospitality to the foreigners, for they too had been foreigners (Deuteronomy 10:19). In Leviticus, God's hospitality shines through as God's people were commanded to leave the edges of their harvest for the poor and the foreigner among them (19:23). In 1

¹⁵⁶ Lorane Coffin, "Hospitality: An Orientation to Benedictine Spirituality," *The American Benedictine Review* 1, no. 39 (March 1988): 51-52, <https://www.americanbenedictinereview.org>.

¹⁵⁷ Pohl, *Making Room*, 28.

and 2 Kings, we find hospitality to the foreigner through a different lens. This time it is the prophets of God, Elijah (1 Kings 17 & 18) and Elisha (2 Kings 4:9), who are the foreigners and outsiders and who are receiving unique hospitality. Extending hospitality came to be viewed as a positive means by which blessing would come to someone's home. Furthermore, "acts of hospitality and inhospitality in the biblical narratives tended to reveal and reflect the underlying good or evil of a person or community."¹⁵⁸ When hospitality was denied, often the result was destruction or judgement; when hospitality was extended, often blessing flowed.

The teachings of Jesus have also been particularly important in shaping the theology of hospitality. In her study of ancient and biblical sources, Pohl found that two New Testament texts were particularly important in shaping the Christian understanding of hospitality: Luke 14 and Matthew 25. In Luke 14, Jesus points to the universal welcome of God and teaches believers that just as God welcomes all to the kingdom table, earthly hosts must also invite to their tables those unable to reciprocate hospitality. "The character of God's hospitality frames appropriate earthly behavior."¹⁵⁹ In Matthew 25, Jesus teaches that those who have welcomed strangers and have met the needs of those in distress have indeed welcomed Jesus Himself. This "powerfully connects hospitality toward human beings with care for Jesus."¹⁶⁰ Through these two passages, Jesus challenges the narrow definitions and practices of hospitality and presses people "outward to include those with whom one least desires to have connections."¹⁶¹ The hospitable way of Christ was as countercultural then as it is now.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 26.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 21.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 22.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 21.

Not only were the teachings of Jesus formative but His actions were even more so. The ministry of Jesus clearly shows us a tangible manifestation of divine hospitality as extended to others. When Jesus extended outlandish hospitality to His disciples by washing their feet, it was “not only a soteriological act, but it also defines the mission of Jesus’s disciples. The disciples’ call is to participate in, to share in this love and mediate it to the world.”¹⁶² That humble act which included sacrifice, generosity, kindness, openness and love, modeled for the disciples what Christian hospitality ought to look like. Jesus—being by very nature God—made them feel like equals by kneeling before each of them and washing their feet. He submitted to them by taking the form of a servant. In that moment of deep intimacy, He defers to them by lowering Himself before them. This is an act from God that is hard to understand and yet it is still the means through which the world will continue to see Jesus today.

Furthermore, Jesus gave His life so that all people could be welcomed into God’s kingdom; this was an act of incredible hospitality. Pointing to this most hospitable divine act of all time, in Romans 15:7, Paul urges the followers of Jesus to “accept one another” as Christ has accepted them. And again, in Romans 12:13 believers are encouraged to “practice hospitality.” In Hebrews 13:2, the command is to not “forget to show hospitality,” and 1 Peter 4:9 instructs believers to offer “hospitality to one another without grumbling.” These texts provide strong evidence that the early church was deeply educated in and placed great importance on the practice of hospitality.

Pentecost was a transformational event in the life of the early church that propelled them towards emulating the hospitality of Jesus. Acts 2 offers a fascinating picture of early

¹⁶² Jipp, *Saved by Faith and Hospitality*, 91.

believers who shared in fellowship, meals, and prayers to the point that they would sell possessions and distribute the proceeds to those who were in need. In the early years of the church, there were several things that served to make hospitality central to their practice: hospitality crossed cultural boundaries, hospitality provided for the needs of missionaries so that the gospel could spread, the establishment of house churches was dependent upon hospitality, and radical hospitality to strangers became a distinguishing factor of Christianity.¹⁶³

Believers in the early church modeled radical hospitality that often-crossed significant cultural boundaries. We see this evidenced in the story of Peter who contrary to cultural norms travelled to Caesarea to enter the house of Cornelius. Here, Peter—a Jew—stayed in the house of Cornelis a Gentile for “several days” (Acts 10:48). Because of Peter’s obedience to go and preach to Gentiles, they, too, received the Holy Spirit; and thus, the early church continued to grow in their witness to the world around them that demonstrated the power of divine hospitality to even break cultural norms.

Hospitality allowed the gospel of Christ to spread because it provided for the needs of missionaries. The gospel initially spread as believers traveled from place to place sharing the gospel and planting churches; these first missionaries depended upon the hospitality of others. In Acts 16 we find the story of Lydia who upon meeting three missionaries—Paul, Silas, and Timothy—“she urged” (Acts 16:15) them to stay in her home. Hospitality of this kind is what provided for the needs of missionaries and allowed for the gospel to spread.

The early church worshipped in house churches and in this setting, hospitality was more natural and necessary. Though early followers of Christ worshiped in the temple, they

¹⁶³ Pohl, *Making Room*, 31-33

also worshipped daily in their homes. “They broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts” (Acts 2:46). This kind of togetherness made hospitality a central practice in their way of life.

Christian hospitality distinguished the early church from other religious movements particularly in the way they offered care to strangers and the very poor of society. While hospitality was important in the world at large at this time, it often was offered with ulterior motives or to people of equal status. Post-Pentecost Christians following the teachings and way of life of Jesus extended hospitality to the poor, hungry, and outcasts of society. Acts 6 shows the extents to which the early followers of Christ went to model compassionate hospitality to widows. We learn that because of this, “the word of God continued to spread” (Acts 6:7). Christian hospitality was distinct because of its focus on the stranger and outcast.

Throughout the scope of Scripture, we find that God’s hospitality is persistently on display and that God is always calling the church to live out and reflect God’s hospitality. Hospitality is the necessary foundation upon which to build the discipleship life of the church; it is faithful to scripture and also to Christian history. We now turn our attention to the historical framework of hospitality.

Part Two: Historical Framework

In the previous section, we established that God’s very nature is hospitable and that hospitality is a Christian practice that can be defined as the gift offered to believers through Christ that allows them to receive guests and strangers with kind and open hearts, thus allowing them to offer sacrificial generosity of their time, talent, and treasure through the spirit of love. Hospitality is a loving practice that can be found throughout Scripture, and

following Christ means that we, too, will emulate divine hospitality in our world. In this section, we will demonstrate that hospitality has been an important practice in Christian tradition and needs to be recovered in our day. If we are to overcome unfaithfulness to sound ecclesiology, we must be willing to learn from those who have come before us.¹⁶⁴ This section will demonstrate that hospitality has stood the test of time and has been a faithful witness of God in the world; it is therefore an appropriate remedy for unfaithfulness to sound ecclesiology.

Hospitality in Church Tradition

Hospitality has been an important and necessary practice in church tradition. However, it is no longer deemed as primary in many contemporary church models. Yet, hospitality is essential to Christianity and a call to return to hospitality as a core practice in the church is necessary. Though as we have previously seen, the Early Church beautifully modelled hospitality, by the Middle Ages, Christian hospitality began to lose some of its early Christian influence and understanding, and hospitality became “an important means for extending power and influence in the church, monastery, and lay society.”¹⁶⁵ By this time, hospitality often became a means to an end, a way to receive advantage or prestige. In reaction to this, Protestant reformers “emphasized offering modest hospitality without expectation of reward or benefit”¹⁶⁶; however, lost in the process was the emphasis on the sacred elements, like the expectation of God’s presence via hospitality, which had shaped the early understandings of this sacred practice. In addition, the changing socioeconomic

¹⁶⁴ Scazzero rightly states that one of the failures of the church today that undermines deep discipleship is that “we ignore the treasures of church history.” Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Discipleship*, 13.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 34.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 34-35.

environment called for a more organized approach to the growing needs of society; hospitality was relegated to social service organizations, and within the church it began to lose its moral and spiritual significance.

In her focused study on the history of hospitality, Pohl finds that, by and large “for most parts of the Western church, hospitality got lost in the eighteenth century.”¹⁶⁷ Strangers were still cared for, orphans and widows were still provided for by the church, but this was no longer regarded an important ministry or called by the name hospitality. The term “hospitality” itself diminished, and the entertainment industry (hotels, restaurants, etc.) was beginning to redefine the term. However, the loss of the term “hospitality” was not surrendered without a fight. We find as early as the mid-sixteenth century that John Calvin mourned the practical demise of ancient hospitality. “He warned that the increasing dependence on inns rather than on personal hospitality was an expression of human depravity.”¹⁶⁸ Others like John Owen, a Puritan theologian and pastor, and Samuel Johnson, an English writer, spoke about the importance of rediscovering the practice of Christian hospitality. Though John Wesley did not use the term “hospitality,” he recovered many of the practices of early Christian hospitality; he “recognized their connection with the vitality of the ancient church.”¹⁶⁹ However, despite efforts to save the term and practice, by the eighteenth century, the term “hospitality” had been hijacked by cultural trappings of luxury and power. As is true with most ancient practices, hospitality did not entirely disappear but great reflections of it were no longer present in church polity and practice.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 36.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 36-37.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 38.

Still, we cannot deny that throughout history we consistently find pockets of the body of Christ who have faithfully offered hospitality to the surrounding world. Christians have entered plague-infested communities, opened their homes to hide refugees, welcomed strangers for the sake of Christ, and even participated in illegal activities when oppressive governments persecuted them. And, here again, in the 21st century hospitality seems to have gained momentum. There seems to be a hunger to dig deeper into the theological and practical richness that it offers. It should not surprise us because we know that God still desires to move in the world through the hospitable attitudes and actions of God's people. "We must remember that the church has progressed through two millennia on God's power at work around ordinary kitchen tables and living rooms. God has always been forming a hospitable people to put His hospitality on display, and if you are in Christ, you're now a part of God's hospitable people."¹⁷⁰ Hospitality has played a major role in the ethics of Scripture and in the overall story of God; it is at the heart of Christianity and stands in sharp contrast to the cultural trends that call for individuality, separation, and isolation. Hospitality is a practice that needs to be reclaimed by the church as it holds the potential to transform our churches into communities that truly live out the mission of God.

The Church of the Nazarene should follow the example of our spiritual father, John Wesley, who rediscovered hospitality via love feasts, organized groups for spiritual care, brought together the poor and weak alongside influential leaders, and organized table fellowship that included rich diversity; we too, can join in this subversive way of living and partake of this "different system of valuing," this "alternate model of relationships,"¹⁷¹ and make a difference in our generation. With the help of Almighty God, we can and we

¹⁷⁰ Willis and Clements, *The Simplest Way to Change the World*, 54.

¹⁷¹ Pohl, *Making Room*, 61.

will. To do so, we must learn from those within history who have modeled hospitality especially well; in this effort, we now turn our attention to Benedictine tenets of hospitality.

Benedictine Hospitality

Some of the most valuable jewels that Christian history offers us regarding hospitality are found in Benedictine spirituality. In Chapter 2, we noted that Benedictine spirituality views hospitality as: God's invitation to humanity, as worship, as transformational, and as corporately formative. In this section we will take a deep look at chapter five of St. Benedict's *Rule*, titled "The Reception of Guests," and provide the basis for Benedictine wisdom on hospitality. The aim of this section is to demonstrate that hospitality continues to have an important place in the life of the Christian community. We will study this portion of St. Benedict's Rule to gain the necessary perspectives to best apply hospitality in our 21st century churches.

Section One

The first section of St. Benedict's *Rule* on hospitality establishes a theological basis for Christian hospitality. It states: "All guests who present themselves are to be welcomed as Christ."¹⁷² Benedictine hospitality requires the acknowledgment that all people are created in the image of God and carry within them the presence of Christ. What we believe will shape how we live out our faith. In her book, *A Spirituality for the 21st Century: The Rule of Benedict*, Chittister writes: "Both the community and the abbot receive the guest. The message to the stranger is clear: come right in and disturb our perfect lives. You are the Christ for us today."¹⁷³ According to Benedict, guests are honored not because of

¹⁷² Timothy Fry, *The Rule of St. Benedict in English* (Collegeville, MI: Liturgical Press, 1982), 59.

¹⁷³ Chittister, *The Rule of Benedict*, 228.

external signs of devotion or righteousness, but on the faith that when we serve even the least of these, we are serving Christ Himself. So, “for the sake of Christ the door must not be bolted. Christ is surely present within the community, but he is also at times the newly coming who disturbs us and discomfits our rest.”¹⁷⁴ St. Benedict and his monks welcomed discomfort for the sake of extending divine hospitality to others because their orthodoxy stated that all “are to be welcomed as Christ.” St. Benedict’s Rule first challenges us to right orthodoxy so that our orthopraxy will also reflect the heart of God.

Section Two

Section two of St. Benedict’s *Rule* on hospitality is focused on the arrival of the guest who is welcomed in with prayer. Praying for one’s own peace in the encounter is just as important as praying for the peace of the newfound friend. Chittister suggests that the function of prayer is to bring us into touch with ourselves as well as with God and others; through prayer we can face our own sins, needs, and find hope.¹⁷⁵ Through distressing encounters, we can come face-to-face with our own doubts, brokenness, sinful attitudes, our calloused or hardened hearts, pride, insecurities, racism, and fears. “Inexplicably, through the effort of reaching out to the foreign other, we also encounter ourselves anew. Our journey leads us somewhere we have never been before.”¹⁷⁶ To encounter peace in those hidden areas of our lives is something only God can bring about through the Holy Spirit and through our openness to let another in. Pratt and Homan present this stunning statement of how Benedictine hospitality calls us to maturity in Christ: “We are accustomed

¹⁷⁴ Aquinata Böckmann, “Approaching Christ in the Rule of Benedict,” *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 44, no. 1 (2009): 34, <https://cistercian-studies-quarterly.org>.

¹⁷⁵ Chittister, *The Rule of Benedict*, 133.

¹⁷⁶ Kyriaki FitzGerald, “Hospitality: Keeping a Place for the ‘Other,’” *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 56, no. 1-4 (2011): 169.

to easy answers. Hospitality is not an easy answer. It requires that we take a chance and we change. It requires us to grow. The moment we engage with another person, everything gets messy. Our time becomes not quite our own; we can count on others to interrupt us. We become subject to a whole hoard of emotional dangers. Because hospitality always involves giving something of ourselves to others, it is a spiritual practice.”¹⁷⁷ This section of St. Benedict’s Rule affirms that praying for someone else is an expression of Christian hospitality and it has the capacity to change both the person that prays and the one being prayed for. As a spiritual discipline prayer requires intentionality, time, and commitment; our prayer life should lead us to a life of radical hospitality.

Section Three

Section three of St. Benedict’s Rule speaks of the humility and kindness with which a follower of Christ must serve the guest or stranger. “Every kindness is shown to him” and, also, “all humility must be shown...by a bow of the head.”¹⁷⁸ Humility is what allows us to set aside our own agendas to better serve the needs of those around us. “Humility is necessary for following the example of those who have gone before when what I want is to do what feels good to me, and to leave others to do as they please.”¹⁷⁹ Benedict believed that his monks should go as far as washing the hands and feet of their guests; strangers were to be given both presence and service. “After a trip through hard terrain and hot sun, the guest is given physical comfort and a good meal, spiritual instruction and human support.”¹⁸⁰ In their book, *The Simplest Way to Change the World*, Willis and Clements suggest it is essential that communities of faith put the *hospital* back into *hospitality*.

¹⁷⁷ Pratt, *Radical Hospitality*, 72.

¹⁷⁸ Fry, *The Rule of St. Benedict in English*, 59.

¹⁷⁹ Benson, *A Good Neighbor*, 27.

¹⁸⁰ Chittister, *The Rule of Benedict*, 230.

“Grasping that hospitality is a meaningful way that we care for spiritually sick people is why we do this, and it will be the lasting power we need to make this a way of life. Because ultimately the end goal of hospitality is care and healing—we do the caring and Jesus does the healing.”¹⁸¹ St. Benedict believed that through humility and kindness, followers of Jesus could participate in the healing work of Christ in the world.

Section Four

In the fourth part of St. Benedict’s Rule on hospitality, “Christ is still more received in the poor and in strangers.”¹⁸² St. Benedict would most likely agree “that when Jesus said, ‘Love one another,’ he did not mean the glamorous, the understood, the popular, or the wealthy; rather, he intended that all persons created in his image be loved without condition for that is how he loves each member of his creation.”¹⁸³ As we provide spiritual and physical hospitality—to the stranger, the sick, the homeless, the poor, the rich, and everyone in between—we become transformed by the act of stepping out of our own comfort zones and being faithful to God’s heartbeat of loving all His children. The other option is to remain locked up in our own world, in our own little neighborhoods, frightened that someone different from us might sneak in. Christian hospitality can help us come to the realization that we are “one among many”; that “someone else is real”; that “someone else has a right to space, too”; that “someone else has needs”; and that “someone else has as much right to be here as I do.”¹⁸⁴ The Holy Spirit of God is at work in us when, via divine hospitality, we begin to see others as equals rather than enemies.

¹⁸¹ Willis and Clements, *The Simplest Way to Change the World*, 70.

¹⁸² Böckmann, “Approaching Christ in the Rule of Benedict,” 23.

¹⁸³ Anthony Maranise, “Welcomed as Christ: Immigration through the Lens of Benedictine Hospitality,” *Benedictines* 69, no. 1 (2016): 39.

¹⁸⁴ Pratt, *Radical Hospitality*, 84.

Section Five

Section five of St. Benedict's *Rule* on hospitality gives detailed instructions on how the work of hospitality is to be divided so that it does not become burdensome and so "they can perform this service without grumbling."¹⁸⁵ If we are to take hospitality seriously in our lives and in our churches, then it must be an intentionally planned and included part of our lives. The workload must be divided, and the liturgies of our church purposefully executed so that we continue to encourage each other on towards love and good works. Hospitality is not a task for a single person or even a group within the church; it must permeate into all that we do because it is who we are called to be as God's people. It is worth the risk, because after all: "Making room for the stranger who could be God changes everything."¹⁸⁶ We find profound wealth of wisdom in St. Benedict's Rule on hospitality, but unless it is intentionally a part of the discipleship ministry of a community it will not be a force that shapes us as kingdom people.

St. Benedict's Rule, which has been alive and dynamic for fifteen centuries and counting, offers many vibrant components of hospitality that help correct unfaithfulness to sound ecclesiology: it challenges the way we view and receive others; it invites us to use prayer as a means for greater hospitality; it promotes humility and kindness; it deals with how we treat the poor and the strangers in our communities; and it reminds us that because hospitality is so essential to the Christ follower, it must become an intentional discipline. St. Benedict still today invites believers to encounter the divine presence that lives in other people through the practice of hospitality; for hospitality shown toward another person is

¹⁸⁵ Fry, *The Rule of St. Benedict in English*, 60.

¹⁸⁶ FitzGerald, "Hospitality," 176.

hospitality toward the Trinity. Like Abraham, we too are being invited on a pilgrim's journey to be a blessing to all of the nations of the world.

In this day and age, numerous seminars, webcasts, conferences, and curricula focus on the topic of church growth and discipleship. All that is offered can be overwhelming, even paralyzing. Fads come and go, and yet many hearts remain hungry for something that has been proven and tested to find hope for the present and the future. The call to a radical lifestyle of hospitality within our churches is not a new spiritual or church growth fad. Over 1,500 years ago, St. Benedict wrote a *Rule* that is followed by thousands of people around the world today and has been followed by many people over the past fifteen centuries. "Benedict's wisdom, offered through his Rule, has proved itself by enduring through every age since its birth. When we live in a throw-away culture such as ours....we look for something that has proved itself to be stable enough to depend on for the long haul, [and] we can trust Benedictine spirituality."¹⁸⁷ The transformative insights that Benedictine hospitality has to offer believers and churches in the 21st century is steady ground for building an ecclesial culture of hospitality.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have demonstrated that hospitality is orthodox: a biblically and historically important and faithful model for shaping ecclesial culture. In Section One we began with the biblical foundations of hospitality; we focused on the Triune nature of God which portrays equality, submission, deference, and intimacy. We then defined hospitality as a gift offered to believers through Christ that allows them to receive guests and strangers with *kind* and *open* hearts, allowing them to offer *sacrificial generosity* through the spirit

¹⁸⁷ Werner, *Reaching for God*, 11.

of *love*. We then took a broad look at hospitality throughout the scope of Scripture. In Part Two, our focus was on the historical framework of hospitality. Here, we focused on hospitality within church tradition but particularly at the Benedictine model of hospitality and its faithful witness in the Christian church. If tenets of hospitality are to be embraced as an important part of the theology, liturgy, and practice of any local congregation, then hospitality itself must first be defined biblically and historically; that is what we have done in this chapter. We have demonstrated that God's hospitality to humanity leads God's people to respond with hospitality to God and others; this requires sacrifice, generosity, kindness, openness, and love.

Hospitality continues to be a means by which God desires to engage the world through the church. It is so much more than we have made it out to be in the 21st century; it is a Christian imperative that needs to be fundamental in our faith communities. It is evident everywhere we look that "people are hungry for welcome,"¹⁸⁸ but most Christian churches have lost the heritage and richness of hospitality in their ecclesiology. The aim of this chapter has been to show that the concept of hospitality is a biblically and historically faithful model upon which to build ecclesial culture. In the next chapter, we will show that "hospitality...is a model of authentic Christian discipleship,"¹⁸⁹ we will show how hospitality can be utilized in the orthopraxy of the church to overcome unfaithfulness to sound ecclesiology.

¹⁸⁸ Pohl, *Making Room*, 33

¹⁸⁹ Anthony Marshall, "Hospitality as a model of discipleship," *Emmanuel* 115, no. 4 (July-August 2009), 342.

CHAPTER 4: DISCIPLESHIP MODEL FOCUSED ON HOSPITALITY OVERCOMES UNFAITHFULNESS TO ECCLESIOLOGY

Introduction

In the previous chapter, we demonstrated that hospitality provides a necessary corrective to unfaithfulness to sound ecclesiology because it is orthodox: biblically and theologically correct and also a faithful witness historically. We now move to discover how the framework of hospitality “provides a bridge which connects our theology with daily life and concerns.”¹⁹⁰ The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate how a holistic approach to hospitality can be utilized in the orthopraxy of the local church to overcome the unfaithfulness to sound ecclesiology that propagates racism, political idolatry, and self-protection. In Part One, we will demonstrate the ways in which a framework of hospitality is foundational to sound ecclesiology. In Part Two, we will demonstrate how hospitality leads from racism to reconciliation. In Part Three, we will show how a framework of hospitality can lead from political idolatry to the confession that Jesus is Lord. In addition to the particular foci of Parts Two and Three, we will further demonstrate in these sections how the praxis of dependence on the Holy Spirit, intentional hospitality, listening to stories, and confession and lament are necessary components to an intentional discipleship model that desires to shift the culture of a local faith community into one that is faithful in her ecclesiology. In Part Four, we demonstrate how a self-protecting mentality can be transformed into a lifestyle of hospitable discipleship. Here, we demonstrate that hospitality is the aim of discipleship and develop a common framework between the two.

¹⁹⁰ Pohl, *Making Room*, 8.

In Part Five, we discuss how a faith community can begin to apply this model of discipleship by taking a close look at church practices and how they can be transformed by a framework of hospitality. Finally, we demonstrate that a Rule of Life focused on intentional and holistic hospitality to God, self, and others is an important tool for the shifting of ecclesial culture.

Part One: Hospitality as Foundational for Ecclesiology

Understanding and embodying Christian hospitality is foundational to the living out of faithful ecclesiology. In Chapter 1, we stated that faithful ecclesiology proceeds from the church understanding herself to be a Spirit-empowered catalyst that reflects God's holiness in the world; and that faulty ecclesiology, then, is that which represents the self-centered systems of the world instead of the heart of God. As a Spirit-empowered catalyst, the church's primary call is to reflect God's holiness in the world. The church is missionary in nature, for her call is to reflect to the world, the holiness that is apparent in the Triune God. As we have seen in Chapter 3, the Trinity is a community of deep love and hospitality, and in their relating to each Member of the Trinity we find full equality, glad submission, mutual deference, and joyful intimacy. This Trinitarian holiness can be understood as divine hospitality.

With these foundational pieces in mind, we now move on to assert that Christian hospitality is the mission of the church. Christian hospitality is not complicated or hard to understand. It can be summarized in these words: Jesus has been the ultimate host and friend; He gave Himself in love for us; now it is our turn to be Jesus's friends and gracious hosts, and love others as we have been loved. "Our humble, human attempts at hospitality point to a revolutionary understanding of the hospitality of God. It is the human response

to the God who loved us first and who still keeps reaching out to us first that undergirds our vision of hospitality. There is nothing in creation that even compares to the hospitality of God.”¹⁹¹ Ultimately, biblical hospitality calls us to extend to others the same grace that we have so freely received.

Living out the Trinitarian model of holy love and hospitality is the primary task of the church today. An ecclesiology founded upon the hospitality reflected in the Trinity is necessary and essential in our world. It stands against attitudes of racism, political idolatry, and self-protection that represent the kingdom of the world rather than the kingdom of God. In this section, we will demonstrate that when the church is living out her mission from a sound ecclesiology, she understands herself to be empowered by the Holy Spirit, she faithfully retells the Story of God and listens to people’s stories well, she is humble in her lament and confession, and acts with intentional hospitality. When this happens, we are then ready to move from racism to reconciliation, from political idolatry to singlehearted devotion to Jesus, and from a self-protection mentality to a lifestyle of hospitable discipleship.

Depending on the Power of the Holy Spirit

Sound ecclesiology always rests upon the understanding that the church lives and operates under the power of the Holy Spirit. Only through the power of the Holy Spirit will the church be able to overcome self-centeredness in the 21st century and allow herself to be guided into challenging and uncomfortable territories. God’s Spirit was “guiding the apostles, preparing the ground for their evangelism, instigating meetings, breaking down barriers, transgressing borders, and challenging ethnic and racial stereotypes.”¹⁹² Likewise

¹⁹¹ FitzGerald, “Hospitality,” 164.

¹⁹² Stone, *Evangelism after Christendom*, 105-106.

for us, if we are to ever move out “beyond our safe and familiar surroundings of our own ethnic groups”¹⁹³ in order to better reflect the image of God by including all people, we will need the Spirit of God to empower us. We cannot attempt to correct, strengthen, or affirm our ecclesiology—or our ecclesial culture and practice—without the power of the Holy Spirit.

Retell the Story

Sound ecclesiology allows us to correctly *retell the Story*. “To become a Christian is to join a story and to allow that story to begin to narrate our lives.”¹⁹⁴ The Holy Scriptures are an inspired library full of stories that portray God’s hospitality and love and teach us kingdom values. We must retell that Story by pointing to the places in the narrative where God’s people sacrificially lived into God’s mission, as well as the places where they failed to do so. “Our churches today are located within this story of God being present to and guiding local communities of God’s people.”¹⁹⁵ In order to be faithful to our ecclesiology, we must faithfully retell the Story of God and call the church to her rightful place within it. Only in knowing the Story well can we understand as a church both where we have been and where we should be going. A faithful retelling of the Story of God’s hospitality is key in people understanding their vocation as hospitable kingdom people.

Lament and Confess

When a church understands her story—both her strengths and her weaknesses—undoubtedly the Holy Spirit will lead her to lament and with humility confess her shortcomings because the Holy Spirit is an agent of transformation and reconciliation. In

¹⁹³ McNeil, *Roadmap to Reconciliation*, 28.

¹⁹⁴ Stone, *Evangelism after Christendom*, 39.

¹⁹⁵ Smith, *How the Body of Christ Talks*, 21.

their book, *A Many Colored Kingdom*, Conde-Frazier, Kang, and Parrett challenge communities of faith to authentically live in the kingdom of God while defying racism, classism, and sexism prevalent in North American culture. They offer this powerful image: “In Greek, one of the words for edify is *kataritizo*, which is a word used to signify the resetting and healing of a bone that has been broken and has healed improperly. The theological/biblical vision for multiculturalism is that of edification, the healing of wrong arrangements in relationships. It is a ministry of reconciliation.”¹⁹⁶ As communities of faith, we must lament that we have caused the breaking of the bone; and with humility we must ask forgiveness both of God and of those the church has transgressed against. God will heal and lead us onward in the ministry of reconciliation as we humbly lament the error of our ways.

Intentional Hospitality

Once a church understands herself as a missionary of God’s love and, empowered by the Holy Spirit, begins to faithfully retell the Story of Scripture, and once she is humble enough to lament and confess, meaningful steps toward the feared other must be taken. Hospitality is the place to begin. The first step in moving towards healing ministry is intentional hospitality. Hospitality is, “a practice that brings us into closer alignment with the basic values of the kingdom. It is part of worshipping Jesus.”¹⁹⁷ But we must be intentional about doing it, otherwise it just remains a good idea. Intentionality is imperative to keep us focused and on the right track. If our ecclesiology is being shaped by the power of the Holy Spirit and we are faithfully retelling the Story of God’s hospitality and

¹⁹⁶ Conde-Frazier, Kang, and Parrett, *A Many Colored Kingdom*, 173.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 171.

lamenting and confessing our shortcomings, the very next step it will lead us to is intentional hospitality.

The ultimate goal of the church is clearly “depicted through the Bible and culminates in Revelation 21: the glorious, eternal worship of God by the redeemed from every tribe and nation.”¹⁹⁸ Therefore, the church can no longer sit back with arms folded going about its business as usual without understanding and working toward her ultimate goal. We must teach and reteach our ecclesiology to remind the church of who she is amidst a culture that seeks to make her forget. Faulty ecclesiology—a failure to lean into sound, biblical, Trinitarian belief and/or practice—that focuses on self-preservation is an obstacle that inhibits a sense of belonging in the church and is in total contradiction to the missionary call of the church to reflect God’s hospitable love to the world.

When faulty ecclesiology (belief and/or practice) has taken root in our churches, it will manifest in attitudes of racism, political idolatry, and self-protection. These create a church culture that stands in stark contrast to the hospitality of God. However, we must not despair; over 2,000 years ago, when the world was in dire straits, divine hospitality via the Incarnate Christ became the solution, and God’s reflected hospitality via Christ’s body is still the solution to the world’s problems today. In this section, we have demonstrated how sound ecclesiology (beliefs and practice) leads the church to depend on the power of the Holy Spirit, to faithfully retell stories, to lament and humbly confession, and to act with intentional hospitality. These areas, when faithfully taught and practiced, will shift the culture of a faith community to one of sound ecclesiology that reflects the hospitality of God. Sound ecclesiology based upon hospitality allows for three important movements to

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 95.

take place: from racism to reconciliation, from political idolatry to the confession that Jesus is King, and from a mentality of self-protection to a lifestyle of hospitable discipleship. To the shift from racism to reconciliation we now turn our attention.

Part Two: Hospitality Leads from Racism to Reconciliation

In the previous section, we demonstrated how hospitality is foundational for sound ecclesiology and how it requires the praxis of dependence on the Holy Spirit, faithfully retelling stories, lament and confession and intentional hospitality. In this section, we will demonstrate how these things also lead a church from racism to reconciliation.

God is a God of reconciliation, and the main vehicle God uses in revealing this to humanity is hospitality. The Garden of Eden is the setting of God's initial hospitality towards creation. God offers humanity not only a marvelous place to live but gives Adam and Eve purpose in asking them to care for and tend to the Garden. However, hospitality is not just something God participates in; it is part of the divine character. Even after Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden, God's hospitality was put on display as God made clothes to cover their shame. And all throughout the biblical narrative we see God using the vehicle of hospitality to draw humanity back into reconciliation with Godself. When Jesus took on human flesh, this was God's most hospitable act of all time. The purpose for this gracious act was "that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:19); hospitality has been the vehicle God uses most in the ministry of reconciliation. The mission of the church is the "ministry of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:18).

The Power of the Holy Spirit for Racial Reconciliation

God's Holy Spirit empowers people in the important ministry of reconciliation. The book of Acts portrays the story of how the Holy Spirit powerfully transforms ethnocentric

people. “It was imperative that those early disciples overcome their ethnocentrism, because reconciliation is at the core of the gospel and is vital for the healing of people and the healing of nations.”¹⁹⁹ On the day of Pentecost, God powerfully demonstrated God’s desire to bring people from all corners of the world into God’s family. And yet, even after the powerful Pentecostal experience, we see that “over and over again the disciples fell back into comfortable ethnocentric patterns and that only God’s miraculous interventions forced them out of their cultural and religious prejudices and isolation.”²⁰⁰ By God’s Spirit the church came into existence, received her mission, and was constantly reformed. “It takes the Holy Spirit to melt down the inner barriers we have erected and to create in us a desire for God and for other people.”²⁰¹ The New Testament provides a tangible picture of how the Holy Spirit disrupted the early believers with the mandate of reconciliation. It was hard work, they struggled, and still they intentionally held one another accountable for being faithful to the ministry of reconciliation among the Gentiles amidst differing philosophies and views (Galatians 2:8-10). In the face of opposition, we see that God’s Spirit empowered believers to remain faithful to the mission of reconciliation.

Intentional Hospitality

The ministry of reconciliation requires intentional hospitality. In the great work of reconciliation, the hospitality of Jesus is our model. “The incarnation calls us to dislocate ourselves from that which is familiar and to relocate ourselves in fellowship with those who are different from us.”²⁰² The work of reconciliation “is a spiritual journey that brings us from practicing hospitality on a one-on-one basis to practicing hospitality that defies the

¹⁹⁹ McNeil and Richardson, *The Heart of Racial Justice*, 33.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 33.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 61.

²⁰² Conde-Frazier, Kang, and Parrett, *A Many Colored Kingdom*, 170.

social arrangements of class, ethnicity, or race.”²⁰³ Hospitality calls for a rearrangement of our relationships, a reordering of our priorities and challenges us to enter into transformational relationship with others. The ministry of reconciliation calls us to value others and invite them to their God ordained place at the Table, a place that actively communicates: “I value you,” “I see you.” Thus, “...hospitality begins a journey towards visibility.”²⁰⁴ Hospitality is a vehicle that God uses that leads to reconciliation. This was true of the work of Christ on earth, and it is still true of the work of the church today. This vital work depends on the empowerment of the Holy Spirit and requires intentionality. A lifestyle of hospitality requires intentionality, it will not happen by default or accident.

Listening to Stories

Stories are another powerful tool God uses in healing and reconciling others to Godself and to one another. The book *Black Like Me*²⁰⁵ offers a compelling true story of a white journalist by the name of John Howard Griffin who undertook a dangerous mission and changed his pigmentation so that he could tour the Deep South to study the living conditions and try to understand civil rights as a “Negro.” His incarnational work, among other contributions, shows the power of entering into another’s story. “It is one thing to hear a person’s testimony, however. It is quite another thing to have a taste—even a small one—of what someone is actually experiencing.”²⁰⁶ Though we cannot all physically enter someone else’s story, it is important that as followers of Christ we continuously find incarnational ways of doing ministry; and hearing one another’s stories is one way that we journey towards reconciliation.

²⁰³ Ibid., 172.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ John Griffin, *Black Like Me* (New York, NY: Penguin Group, 1962).

²⁰⁶ Conde-Frazier, Kang, and Parrett, *A Many Colored Kingdom*, 48.

Lament and Confession

Stories are a good launching pad in reconciliation ministry. However, it is not enough to simply hear someone's story and feel genuine compassion; we must also remember the terror Christians have perpetrated on one another. "Any reconciliation that does not require such a remembering cannot be the reconciliation made possible by the cross of Christ. God's shalom does not ignore human suffering but takes it up and vindicates it."²⁰⁷ In order to be faithful to our ecclesiology, we must be willing to approach talks of reconciliation with lament and humility. "Christians have to approach reconciling with an air of humility, with active listening, which can then become real conversation."²⁰⁸ These conversations begin with humble prayer; "there may be no greater thing you could do to become an agent of ethnic healing and reconciliation."²⁰⁹ If Christians became intentional and humble listeners of people's stories, and lament and confess together, it would powerfully portray the heart of God for the world today.

We have previously stated that racial discrimination is a fruit of unfaithfulness to sound ecclesiology, and a sin that the church has committed, a sin we must ardently repent from time and again. In this section we have demonstrated that reconciliation is an important work that God wants the church to undertake—through receiving power from God's Spirit, by intentionally extending hospitality, by sharing stories, and through prayerful confession and lament. This faithful pursuit of reconciliation will allow us to

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 216.

²⁰⁸ Amy Frykholm, "Reckoning with a Racist Legacy," *Christian Century* (May 22, 2019): 10-11, <http://www.christiancentury.org>.

²⁰⁹ McNeil and Richardson, *The Heart of Racial Justice*, 104.

“contribute to healing historical reality and fostering reconciliation among human beings and with God.”²¹⁰ This is an important call the church must heed to today.

Another fruit of unfaithfulness to sound ecclesiology is political idolatry; this hinders the work of Christ in the world and taints the witness of the church. It must and can be uprooted through the power of the Holy Spirit, listening to stories, intentional hospitality and humility and confession. We now turn our attention to overthrowing this idol and declaring that only Jesus is King.

Part Three: Hospitality Leads from Political Idolatry to Confession that Only Jesus is King

One of the key places where our discipleship—our single-minded, single-hearted, and absolute loyalty to Jesus Christ—is put to the test is at the place of our political loyalties. Offering unwavering allegiance to a political party interferes with a Christian’s call to remain peculiar, obedient, willing to sacrifice and suffer, and ready to embrace holiness living. Though we know that the call of Christ should transcend and rule our political dispositions and loyalties, politics is a prevailing idol in the church of Jesus Christ today. Any solution that seeks to change this narrative begins first and foremost with repentance for the way we have allowed politics to influence our Christian ethics; this kind of idolatry is harshly inhospitable to God’s Spirit and God’s mission. Love is the supreme ethic upon which Christ has built the church, but misplaced allegiances will always affect those we love and those we exclude; it leads to judgement, alienation, and inhospitable attitudes, and it creates unhealthy divisions among people. This section will demonstrate

²¹⁰ O. Ernesto Valiente, “From Conflict to Reconciliation: Discipleship in the Theology of Jon Sobrino,” *Theological Studies* 74 (2013): 657.

that the idol of politics can be overthrown by dependence on the Holy Spirit, intentional hospitality, listening to the stories of others, and lament and confession.

Dependence on the Holy Spirit

The politics of this world have a way of getting so deeply rooted in our hearts that we often do not realize that we are giving the allegiance to Caesar that only Christ is worthy of. In a provocative article titled: “The Evangelical Church is Breaking Apart,” Wehner states that “when the Christian faith is politicized, churches become repositories not of grace but of grievances, places where tribal identities are reinforced, where fears are nurtured, and where aggression and nastiness are sacralized.”²¹¹ When because of political disagreements hatred, resentments, put-downs, insults, and vilifications become commonplace for Christians, we can be sure that political idolatry has infiltrated the church. And, “too many pastors and spiritual leaders are crumbling under the pressure of being on the front lines of their congregations splitting into warring camps.”²¹² In an effort to understand the effect that COVID and the summer of 2020 had on churches, Wehner interviewed 15 pastors, he states: “What I heard was jarring. They told me that nothing else they’ve faced approaches what they’ve experienced in recent years, and that nothing had prepared them for it.” Furthermore, he states that several pastors “have not just quit their churches but resigned from ministry.”²¹³ Political idolatry has infiltrated many of our churches, and we need to pray and surrender to the power of the Holy Spirit in order to be convicted and restored to full submission to the Lordship of Christ.

²¹¹ Peter Wehner, “The Evangelical Church is Breaking Apart,” *The Atlantic*, October 2021, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2021/10/evangelical-trump-christians-politics/620469/>.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Ibid.

Another symptom of political idolatry is the “domestication” of Jesus; of making Jesus out to be a god of our own concoction rather than the King that He is. “Too many Christians have domesticated Jesus by their resistance to his call to radically rethink our attitudes toward power, ourselves and others.”²¹⁴ Political idolatry gives the world a deformed image of Jesus. “The pain of this moment is watching those who claim to follow Jesus do so much to distort who he really was.”²¹⁵ It will take the Holy Spirit’s power to open our eyes to see that no earthly political system will ever fully represent the values of the kingdom of God and to follow Jesus into transformational work in our communities, so that like “the early Christians transformed the Roman empire not by demanding but by loving, not by angrily shouting about their rights in the public square but by serving even the people who persecuted them,”²¹⁶ we, too, would faithfully follow the crucified Savior.

The church depends on the power of the Holy Spirit, and there is nothing that is an insurmountable barrier for God, not even misplaced allegiances to political parties. Rather, we find that God can heal our capacity to “love those who are different from us,” whereby powerfully demonstrating “God’s transformative power in and through his people.”²¹⁷ Nothing short of the Holy Spirit’s power is sufficient to break the political idolatry that guides behaviors, affects attitudes, and defines our love. God has a vested interest in the church succeeding in her mission of loving others; so, as we sincerely repent and ask for God’s Spirit to forgive and guide us, God will guide the church to Spirit-led acts of intentional hospitality.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Carole, *Community Mosaic*, 45.

Intentional Hospitality

God's Spirit works to restoratively heal our relationships with one another and allows us to participate in this healing by the gift of human presence via hospitality so that we can come to see others "not as members of some opposing group, (Democrats, if we are Republicans; the older generations, if we are young, and so on) but rather as fellow human beings and fellow sisters and brothers in Christ, with whom we share abundant common ground."²¹⁸ As hospitable people, we will be called on by God to cross boundaries and borders that once kept us at a point of hostility; but now God moves us towards others with "a radical openness."²¹⁹ Because of the work of Christ, as Christians, we are "prejudiced toward hospitality,"²²⁰ particularly towards those in need, because that's the way Christ has treated us and commanded us to treat others. Hospitality is a needed and important discipline for the church "that finds itself in a fearful world where hostility to the Other is commended as patriotism."²²¹ What a radical difference the church could make if we modeled the way of Christ even in this area of life—if we learned to make friends with someone of another race, ethnicity, political affiliation, or age group. We could bring social change one friendship at a time and oppose the current forces of culture that call us to isolation and dehumanization of others. The temptation of the church is to gain political power like Christians did so long ago under Constantine, but we must remember that when the church gained power, the "loving, sacrificing, giving, transforming Church became the angry, persecuting, killing Church."²²² In order to overcome this temptation, we must

²¹⁸ Smith, *How the Body of Christ Talks*, 90.

²¹⁹ Ross, "Brexit, Trump, and Christ's Call to Discipleship," 379.

²²⁰ Willimon, *Fear of the Other*, 7.

²²¹ Ibid., 78.

²²² Wehner, "The Evangelical Church is Breaking Apart."

remain people prejudiced towards intentional hospitality that is planned and ready for action because it is priority in our lives and churches.

We have seen thus far in this section that dependence on the Holy Spirit and intentional hospitality will lead to the breaking of political idolatry. We now look at another important component which is listening to the stories of others.

Listening to the Stories of Others

Listening to the stories of others is key for the church who wishes to live out a faithful ecclesiology founded upon hospitality. Forces of culture are so strong that, often without realizing it, we sort ourselves into spaces where most of the people are of similar background to us; in so doing, we then “are being formed with a diminished capacity for conversation, and we bring this resistance to conversation with us as we gather in our churches.”²²³ Listening to the stories of another person is a powerful tool God uses to break us of loyalties that are imperfect and harmful to the kingdom and to re-enculturate us to the *imago Dei*. “The nature of conversation is fundamentally about listening and being present with others in our community as we learn to practice the sort of mutual presence that is inherent in the Trinity.”²²⁴ Faith communities that affirm prevenient grace and offer hospitality must also ask honest questions such as: “How can we create a sense of belonging?”²²⁵ To have border-crossing conversations does not mean that we all agree on everything or even that we vote in the same way. “One of the biggest misconceptions in contemporary society is that in order to love well, everyone must agree.”²²⁶ We can love

²²³ Smith, *How the Body of Christ Talks*, 7.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 51.

²²⁵ Carole, *Community Mosaic*, 51.

²²⁶ Andrew Marin, *Us Versus Us: The Untold Story of Religion and the LGBT Community* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2016), 164.

others without agreeing with them because, just like us, they too are a person made in the image of God and whom God loves dearly. It is that understanding of people that warrants love, not any other factor. Honest conversation allows for everyone to have a place at the table of Christ regardless of the differences that each might hold.

Political idolatry leads many people to be more committed to their politics than to what the Bible actually says. Wehner states that as churches, “we have failed not only to teach people the whole of scripture, but we have failed to help them think biblically. We have failed to teach that sometimes scripture is most useful when it doesn’t say what we want it to say, because then it is correcting us.” Teaching people to think biblically is an important task because disagreement often happened in Scripture, and we can learn how to disagree biblically as well. “There is a lot of disagreement in the New Testament, and it gives us a template for how to listen to each other and to understand rather than to argue.”²²⁷ When as individuals and churches we are submitted to the power and authority of the Holy Spirit, political idolatry begins to be dismantled by carefully listening to the stories, experiences, and perspectives of others. This can expand our capacity to see through the eyes of another and break us of our selfishness and our desire to always be right. Faithfully listening to stories leads to confession and lament.

Confession and Lament

Storytelling in Christian fellowship opens the way for confession and lament, and this kind of humility allows for deep healing. In her book, *Community Mosaic: Competencies for Multicultural Ministry*, Carole offers this compelling statement: “When we create a safe space for stories, for exchange, for lament, for sharing tears and pain, joy

²²⁷ Wehner, “The Evangelical Church is Breaking Apart.”

and laughter, we embody the love of Christ in visible ways. A community that can lament is a community that brings reconciliation.”²²⁸ One of the most hospitable actions a Christian can take is to humbly lament and ask for forgiveness; the church “has discovered the capacity to publicly resist and redeem the powers through confession and forgiveness of sin around a common table.”²²⁹ As a black man, John Perkins suffered greatly at the hands of white Christians in the 1960s. His statement is a convicting teacher for us today: “I find it hard to believe in forgiveness without deep repentance.”²³⁰ In his time, politics gave people the right to blatantly discriminate against black Americans. Political notions that affirm discrimination are contrary to the Way of Christ and must be uprooted from the hearts of Christians. A church that laments together is a church God can use in the ministry of reconciliation.

The doctrine of Christian hospitality is a unique and appropriate framework that offers theologically grounded solutions to correct the church’s unfaithfulness to sound ecclesiology that leads to racism and political idolatry. Another symptom of faulty ecclesiology is a mentality of self-protection. In the next section we will demonstrate how a self-protecting mindset can be transformed into a lifestyle of hospitable discipleship.

Part Four: From a Self-Protecting Life to Hospitable Discipleship

In the previous sections, we have demonstrated that the symptoms of faulty ecclesiology—racism and political idolatry—can be corrected by way of an approach based on hospitality that embodies dependence upon the Holy Spirit, retelling and listening to stories, intentional hospitality, and lament and confession. In this section we will

²²⁸ Carole, *Community Mosaic*, 103.

²²⁹ Stone, *Evangelism after Christendom*, 113.

²³⁰ Perkins, *Let Justice Roll Down*, 12.

demonstrate that another symptom of faulty ecclesiology: a self-protecting mindset, can be uprooted when a faith community intentionally embraces a model of discipleship based on a corporate framework of hospitality. First, we will demonstrate how a self-protecting mindset is contrary to hospitable discipleship. Then, we will demonstrate that the formation of hospitable Christians is the aim of discipleship and offer ways that local churches can begin to embody a hospitable lifestyle.

Self-Protection as Contrary to Hospitable Discipleship

In Chapter 2, we defined discipleship as: answering the call of Christ to enter a peculiar lifestyle that leads to obedience, sacrifice, and a life of holiness. Everything about discipleship calls us to shatter a self-protecting mentality. Jesus calls the church to follow His example and spread holy love everywhere that we go. We do not have to walk with Jesus for too long before we see that He routinely stops to talk to women, children, outcasts, sinners, and those who were sick. He lavished holy love upon those whom He encountered. We cannot follow Jesus and spread holy love in the world if we cloister ourselves and separate from the world around us. A lifestyle of following Jesus requires that we shed a self-protecting mentality and embody hospitality in all our encounters.

In the following section, we will demonstrate the common framework of peculiarity, obedience, sacrifice, and holiness that exists between discipleship and hospitality and affirm that the formation of hospitable Christians is the aim of discipleship.

The Formation of Hospitable Christians as the Aim of Discipleship

In the previous section we demonstrated that hospitality calls us to a life centered around Christ and others and to resist a self-protecting mentality. It is an amazing discovery to find how radically early Christians practiced hospitality, not because they were trying to

be pious, “but because they were profoundly moved by God’s welcome in their own lives and wanted to share it in concrete ways—tending to the contagious sick that no one would help, receiving foreign refugees seeking aid, welcoming the poor and outcasts in their communities. They offered hospitality because they believed God really had new and abundant life to offer everyone.”²³¹ The formation of hospitable Christians is the aim of discipleship. The invitation to follow Christ into a peculiar lifestyle that requires obedience, sacrifice, and that leads to holiness will produce Christlike disciples—disciples who emulate the hospitality of God to the world.

Hospitality: A Call to Be Peculiar

Christ’s call to follow Him into a peculiar lifestyle of discipleship is an invitation to be unusual or strange, to become radically different from the world. God’s invitation then—to act with hospitality in the world—is also a call to peculiarity because it is vastly different and countercultural to extend this kind of welcome and embrace to strangers. Hospitality is not what it was in biblical times; in the 21st century, hospitality often becomes a means to an end and not an end in itself. Humanity wants to be on the winning end of everything. But what we find is that God’s hospitality calls us to be peculiar people who are in this world but not of it. “The otherworldliness of the Christian life ought...to be manifested in the very midst of the world, in the Christian community and in its daily life.”²³² We are called to be counter cultural citizens of heaven who live upon earth by offering God’s hospitality generously as a part of our daily lives.

²³¹ Amy Oden, *God’s Welcome: Hospitality for a Gospel-Hungry World* (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2008), 8.

²³² Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 265.

Hospitality: A Call That Requires Obedience

We have previously stated that discipleship requires obedience. To obey someone is to submit to their authority. In our discipleship journey, God will invite us to submit to God's authority and model God's hospitable nature in the world. Hospitality as a Christian imperative, when heeded to can become a "tangible testimony to our wholehearted embrace of Jesus's person and message,"²³³ but this requires submitting to Jesus in a unique way because it is contrary to how we are programmed to act in our current culture. Before Jesus ascended to heaven, He left His small band of followers with an important commission that continues to be a call to obedience for all believers. "All Christians are commissioned by Jesus Himself to go out to the ends of the earth and be hospitable to those who don't yet know Him. How do we do that? We do that by being ambassadors of Christ and ministers of reconciliation."²³⁴ We have been given the ministry of reconciliation, which invites us to pay attention to the brokenness of the world around us and—amidst the face of injustice, pain, fear, and division—to declare loud and clear that all are welcome at the table of our Lord. "God's welcome starts to become who we are, not just what we do."²³⁵ Divine hospitality calls us to pay attention to the world around us and to embody hospitality deep in our bones. The goal is not just that we learn to be welcoming people, but that we submit to God's authority and allow God's hospitality to live in us.

Hospitality: A Call to Sacrifice

Just like sacrifice can be expected in the process of discipleship, in a hospitable lifestyle sacrifice should also be expected. God goes beyond merely extending hospitality

²³³ Jipp, *Saved by Faith and Hospitality*, 7.

²³⁴ Camp, *The Hospitality of God*, 27.

²³⁵ Oden, *God's Welcome*, 54.

to humanity; “not only has He modeled it, but He has made it a part of every Christian’s identity and calling.”²³⁶ We cannot follow Christ without living into His hospitality and to welcome God and others in the same measure that we have been welcomed poses difficulty because it requires risk. Yet, we are called to “take risks in order to be faithful, to trust in God’s leading, regardless of outcome. Risk is a spiritual mark of hospitality.”²³⁷ We follow Jesus, the greatest risk-taker of all time; with risk comes suffering. Hospitality calls us to sacrifice our time, talent, and treasure for the sake of God’s kingdom.

Hospitality: A Call to Holiness

A lifestyle of hospitality also leads us to holiness, and this is best depicted by our willingness to carry our cross and follow Jesus. This type of surrender was of course modeled by God who “made countless provisions toward people who were hostile toward Him to create lasting, deep relationships with them in the context of His hospitality. Certainly, this is a great model for the church!”²³⁸ Perhaps nothing may feel more like death than fully embracing God’s call to be hospitable to those who are hostile towards us. “To serve our brother, to please him, to allow him his due and to let him live, is the way of self-denial, the way of the cross. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.”²³⁹ This is what we are called to in a holiness lifestyle that models God’s hospitality.

Hebrews 12:14 states that “without holiness, no one will see the Lord.” I interpret this to mean that God will only be seen in the world by way of a holy people who emulate God’s nature. In the same way, I would suggest that without hospitality, no one will see

²³⁶ Camp, *The Hospitality of God*, 19.

²³⁷ Oden, *God’s Welcome*, 21-22.

²³⁸ Camp, *The Hospitality of God*, 19.

²³⁹ Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 13.

the Lord. God's holy people will put God's hospitality on display, and this is the way that the world will know who God is. In doing this, we will be amazed to discover that this call to "gospel hospitality is God's welcome into a new way of seeing and living. Ultimately, gospel hospitality is God's welcome into abundance of life, into God's own life."²⁴⁰ When we begin to tap into the power of God's Spirit that is vibrant and abundant and overflowing in our hearts, we are then able to offer that life to those around us. As we partake in God's resurrection power every day, we will naturally begin to welcome others to that table; "hospitality calls us beyond friendliness to share the solid food that blesses our lives."²⁴¹ This process opens us up to live in resurrection power. A new relationship is birthed through the act and the process of hospitality "whereby the identity of the stranger is transformed into that of a guest."²⁴² Jesus empowers us by His Spirit to live such abundant lives that strangers see God's beauty radiating through holiness and hospitality and are transformed into guests; lives marred by sin and brokenness can now enjoy relationship with God and others in redemptive ways. A lifestyle of holiness entails living a lifestyle of holistic hospitality—to God, self, and others—and this shatters a self-protecting mindset and opens followers of Christ to participate in hospitable discipleship.

In this section, we have seen that hospitality is the aim of discipleship and that the two (discipleship and hospitality) share a common framework. The formation of a people who reflect the hospitable heart of God to the world has always been the desire of God and the very reason we engage in the peculiar lifestyle that leads to obedience, sacrifice, and holiness. Hospitality is a faithful model upon which to base the discipleship ministry of a

²⁴⁰ Oden, *God's Welcome*, 11.

²⁴¹ Ibid., 12.

²⁴² Jipp, *Saved by Faith and Hospitality*, 2.

local church. To further demonstrate this, in the next section, we will see how a discipleship model based upon hospitality can be applied to the local church.

Part Five: Application of a Discipleship Model Based on Hospitality

In the previous section, we demonstrated that hospitality is the aim of discipleship and that these two share a common framework based upon peculiarity, obedience, sacrifice, and holiness. Hospitality is not optional for the Christian who longs to live out a faithful call to discipleship. A discipleship model based upon Christian hospitality is essential for shifting ecclesial culture. The aim of this section is to provide tangible ways by which a faith community can model a commitment to hospitality corporately.

In his book, *You Are What You Love*, James K. A. Smith argues that “the orientation of the heart happens from the bottom up, through the formation of our habits of desire. Learning to love (God) takes practice.”²⁴³ True and sustainable change will not happen by merely thinking better thoughts but by learning to love; and learning to love takes practice, liturgy, and intentional rituals. In this section we will point out some incredible discipleship opportunities found within the life of the church for correcting ecclesial culture: these are liturgy in worship, prayer, intentional fellowship, the way others are welcomed into community life, and small groups.

Liturgy of Worship

God is deeply vested in our formation as disciples of Christ and has given us innumerable spiritual practices to help us become readily available to hear God’s Spirit and participate with God and others in gracious hospitality in the world. These practices that transform us include, but are not limited to, prayer, singing, reading the Scriptures,

²⁴³ Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 25.

silence/solitude, fasting, worship, hospitality, listening to sermons, and Sabbath-keeping. However, what we find is that many Christians carry deep and paralyzing guilt when it comes to personal discipleship practices because our American way of life leaves us overscheduled, tense, fatigued, addicted to hurry, and maxed out. We have crammed as much as possible into our lives, and we battle to make the best use of every spare moment in our day. Most believers leave themselves with very little margin to welcome God's presence in their daily lives because they are overworked and tired. And many people approach church services with this limited capacity or margin to hear God. Yet, our call to peculiarity, obedience, suffering, and holiness beckons us to continue to encourage and lead others into the countercultural discipleship journey of faith.

One of the ways that we can do this is through liturgical practices in worship. By creating space for God's presence in corporate settings we can help those we lead get better acquainted with God and further discover their true self. "Discovering the true self, the image of God within, cannot happen apart from entering into the mystery of Christ through liturgy and the individual prayer that prepares for and continues the saving act of Christ in our personal lives."²⁴⁴ An intentional liturgy of worship can help people become hospitable to God as we listen to God's voice and look for God's action in our daily lives. In essence, formative practices allow us to offer hospitality to God, self, and others.

Our liturgy of worship should consistently point towards God's hospitality and encourage believers to act accordingly. If "Christian worship is the feast where we acquire new hungers—for God and for what God desires—and are then sent into his creation to act

²⁴⁴ Coffin, "Hospitality," 69.

accordingly,”²⁴⁵ then we must make sure our worship services are a spiritual banquet that retrains and reorients people to God.

Retelling the Story

Faithfully retelling the Story of God is an important part of our liturgy of worship. James K. A. Smith assures that transformative rituals are those that are “loaded with an ultimate Story about who we are and what we’re for.”²⁴⁶ If the measure by which we challenge the rituals that take place in our services became how well they retell the ultimate Story of God’s bountiful hospitality offered to *all* humanity, it could powerfully begin to transform us from the inside out. Our worship songs, the way we greet others, the way we share announcements, the exposition of the sermon, the way we offer communion, and officiate baptisms and weddings, all must point to that Story. If, with intentionality, we connect our liturgies to the ultimate Story of God’s hospitality, transformative change could take place within our churches. “Worship is the heart of discipleship if and only if worship is a repertoire of Spirit-endued practices that grab hold of your gut, recalibrate your kardia, and capture your imagination.”²⁴⁷ Any discipleship model that longs to encourage, equip, and empower individuals to grow into hospitable disciples will act with intentionality through every part of the worship service. God is by nature a hospitable God, and our worship services must be a vivid reminder of that so that people will understand their mission in the world as well.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 65.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 46.

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 83.

Prayer

A pervasive attitude of hospitality will also challenge the way we pray in corporate settings. Churches must intentionally extend hospitality to God's Spirit by become a people of prayer who learn to wait on the Lord's direction. The Lord is the "Chief Shepherd" of the church (1 Peter 5:4) and wants to lead the church. If we press in to hear God's voice through humble and intentional prayer—in board meetings, in meaningful conversations, in our worship settings—God will show up and will inspire sermons, disrupt Sunday school classes, and uproot old ideologies. If we humbly ask and wait on the Lord, God will show up in tangible ways.

Sacramental Hospitality

It is the worship rituals we learn within our church services that will allow us to continue that worship into every encounter we have in our daily lives. In an article titled "Welcomed as Christ: Immigration through the Lens of Benedictine Hospitality," Maranise states that the practice of hospitality is one of *sacramental character* because it outwardly expresses a deeper unseen reality that allows for transformation to occur in the meeting between two individuals. He contends that hospitality is a *liturgical action* because it is a form of worship in the sense that by greeting others as Christ, we are worshipping Christ himself.²⁴⁸ Hospitality itself—if viewed through the lens of sacrament and liturgy—is a sacrifice, something that must be learned and that does not come naturally. The gospel story "has the power to transform us into that 'new and radically different kind of people' and create beautiful, countercultural groups of Christians so moved by God's hospitality to

²⁴⁸ Anthony Maranise, "Welcomed as Christ: Immigration through the Lens of Benedictine Hospitality," *Benedictines* 69, no. 1 (2016): 32-41.

them they can't help but be hospitable to others.”²⁴⁹ The worship service is a powerful component to the intentional discipleship ministry of the church.

Intentional Fellowship

Intentional fellowship is a powerful means by which the culture of a church can be transformed into one that embodies hospitality. When Jesus fed the crowds, one of the key components of the miracle was that He set out a “table of fellowship” for people from all walks of life to sit around and share life together. Fellowship is an important practice in the life of the church; intentionality in fellowship can be a transformative discipline for faith communities. If “intentional rituals”—such as assigned seats and talking points for guided conversation—were strategically planned for fellowship gatherings, that would allow for people who are not yet hospitable to one another to share their individual stories with each other. One of the “rituals” around our tables of fellowship could be the Benedictine practice of offering a prayer for peace.

Attitudes of indifference will not be dismantled by theology alone; we must provide tangible opportunities for people to listen to each other and to experience life through the eyes of the other. Hospitality requires recognition, where, through simple actions, “we convey the truth that wayward sinners are made in the image of God, where we say to those who might doubt their worth or purpose, ‘I see You! You are welcome here...pull up a chair.’”²⁵⁰ Intentional fellowship “rituals” can be the instrument God uses to stretch us towards Christian maturity as faith communities. As we find ourselves sharing a meal with someone who is quite different than we are, that uncomfortable habit might allow for love to grow where there otherwise was fear. “Here is the core of hospitality: May I know you

²⁴⁹ Willis and Clements, *The Simplest Way to Change the World*, 73.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 51.

better? Will you come closer, please? No, it will not be easy, but make no mistake about it: your life depends on this saving stranger coming to you and stretching your tight little heart.”²⁵¹ To be a disciple of Jesus means that we are in community with the body of Christ; intentional fellowship is a great place to start to grow as a disciple that is learning to extend godly hospitality. The culture of a church can be transformed when people intentionally extend hospitality to one another in fellowship.

Welcoming Others

Welcoming others as if they were Christ Himself is not a hard task when we are greeting people who are friendly, kind, well-put together, or who look like and live life in the same ways we do. It becomes a spiritual workout when people we fear or who seem different from us walk through the doors of our church. “Daily, Benedict tells his monks, you and I will encounter Jesus. You will stroll right past him if you aren’t careful. Instead, look closer, look in the person’s eyes, search for that spark of light, and let yourself be open to the possibility of God coming to you in the stranger.”²⁵² As believers, Christ’s mission compels us to progress towards an attitude of inclusivity for all people without regard to their ethnic or national origins and without fear. Fear can take hold of humans in very negative ways; it builds walls instead of bridges and causes us to ignore the pleas and the needs of others and by so doing we “close ourselves to the stranger; we close ourselves to the Sacred.”²⁵³ Perhaps the greatest challenge for long-established Nazarene churches is to remember that even as broken individuals we all innately carry the image of God placed in us at creation. Our focus on entire sanctification has consequently led some to lose sight

²⁵¹ Pratt, *Radical Hospitality*, 74.

²⁵² Ibid., 78.

²⁵³ Ibid., 23.

of how God loves, welcomes, and cares for all of humanity—those within the body of believers and those not yet there.

In order to welcome “others” well, we must first begin to change the way that we talk about “others.” “People can often sense when they are devalued and not really wanted, or when they actually may be more of an inconvenience than a welcomed guest or newly discovered loved one.”²⁵⁴ We must become intentional about changing descriptive words—such as the lost, homeless, broken, drug addict, divorced, low-income individual, etc.—and trading those judgmental labels for words of hope—people for whom Christ died, a restless heart in search of God, my neighbor, an image bearer, or a miracle in the making. “Churches characterized by radical hospitality are not just friendly and courteous passively receiving visitors warmly. Instead, they exhibit a restlessness because they realize so many people do not have a relationship to a faith community.”²⁵⁵ There is great potential present in our congregations to become restless communities, eager to “welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God” (Romans 15:7, NRSV). At the end of each day, everything we do inside the walls of the church should prompt our members to reflect upon the interactions and opportunities of their day by asking themselves two simple questions: “Did I see Christ in them? Did they see Christ in me?” That simple confessional act can powerfully transform our communities of faith.

Sunday School Classes/Small Groups

When larger groups gather in smaller numbers there is something transformational that can happen in the human heart. Sunday school and small groups still hold tremendous

²⁵⁴ FitzGerald, “Hospitality,” 166.

²⁵⁵ Schnase, *Five Practices*, 17.

potential for the discipleship life of a local church and are prime places for the shifting of the culture of a church into one that is hospitable and welcoming to God, self, and others. Sunday school classes and/or small groups can model for people how hospitality to God is extended. This can be done by affirming in prayer that God is a welcomed Guest in our gatherings and by leading in such a way that we believe that God is present with us when we gather. In this setting, we also learn how to be hospitable to ourselves because these spaces often allow for accountability and for people to open their hearts and lives to others in ways that other ministries do not always allow for. A lot of personal healing can happen by being part of a smaller group of believers.

Sunday school classes/small groups are also a prime ministry for hospitality to others to be taught, encouraged, and put into practice. In these settings, there is often the need to show patience to people who are awkward, those who talk too much or too little, or those who are different from the rest. It also gives the opportunity for a group of people to pool their resources and meet certain needs present inside or outside the church. Participating in mission together can have a far-reaching effect, one that a single person could not have on their own. Sunday school classes/small groups are prime places in the discipleship life of the church to teach, model, and receive Christian hospitality. Pohl states that we cannot expect to recover the practice of hospitality to strangers without “also considering the necessity of recovering close communities.”²⁵⁶ She believes that intentional communities are the ones most able to extend hospitality. “When we look for examples of hospitality to stranger in contemporary society, we find the most vibrant expressions in intentional Christian communities.”²⁵⁷ Small groups within the church have

²⁵⁶ Pohl, *Making Room*, 161.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

profound potential to help shift the culture of a church into one who understands her mission as hospitality. Appendix B provides a resource for small groups to use when they are ready to intentionally commit to being on the journey of hospitality together.

In this section, we have demonstrated ways in which a model of discipleship focused upon hospitality can begin to be applied in the local church. Through faithful discipleship practices God can teach us to love what God loves and to remain surrendered to a lifestyle of Christlikeness. Without God's love, we have no hope of fulfilling the mission of God here on earth. When it comes to the discipleship life of a local church, intentional liturgies, rituals, and theological re-training can all be used by God to grow our capacity to love God and others. Our worship service liturgies, prayer, fellowship times, the way we view and welcome others, and our Sunday school classes or small groups—when infused with hospitality—can help us more fully become the church God has called us to be. We now move on to discuss how the developing of a Rule of Life focused upon hospitality is an important practice for shifting ecclesial culture.

Developing a Rule of Life for Hospitable Living

Offering hospitality in a world that is distorted by sin, brokenness, injustice, pride, and deceit will never be easy. But we already know walking the discipleship life with Jesus will be hard and demanding. For this reason, having a Rule of Life—like that which St. Benedict developed and that is still forming hospitable believers around the world today—is of utmost importance. A Rule of Life keeps a person centered, intentional, and accountable to being a faithful follower of Christ.

Holistic hospitality entails offering hospitality to God, self and others. We are more accustomed to viewing hospitality as simply something we do for others, but an intentional

Rule of Life that takes hospitality seriously will take a holistic approach to hospitality. In order to be deeply formative and affect ecclesial culture The Rule of Life would need to reflect a holistic approach to hospitality—to God, self and others—and include both a personal and corporate component.

Hospitality to God

Holistic hospitality is essential in helping believers live faithful lives as disciples of Christ. Offering hospitality to God is the most essential step towards transformational change: personally, and corporately. God’s extravagant hospitality extends to humanity the offer of salvation and right relationship with God. Receiving God’s hospitality and then offering hospitality back to God begins the work of transformation in the believer, which is a necessary discipleship step in the development of Christian character. God’s perfect love refuses to leave us in our places of brokenness and sin. “We are to die to the sinful parts of who we are—such as defensiveness, detachment from others, arrogance, stubbornness, hypocrisy, judgmentalism, a lack of vulnerability—as well as more obvious sins.”²⁵⁸ Once God’s hospitality is received by a person and we, in turn, offer hospitality to God and allow God entrance into the deeper places of our being, God begins the transformation process. The Holy Spirit moves into the life of the believer as not just Host but a welcomed Guest. And this Guest wishes to overtake every room in our house with God’s power and grace.

Offering daily hospitality to the welcomed Guest that now abides in us is of utmost importance for anyone who calls themselves a follower of Jesus. As we engage in both personal and corporate discipleship practices, we will find that they are indeed gifts from

²⁵⁸ Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, 26.

a hospitable God. One of the most radiant examples of this is the beautiful gift God gives us in Sabbath. Sabbath delight reminds us of the mutual indwelling of the Trinity and invites us to worship God and enjoy God's gifts for what they truly are. "Without the Sabbath, we easily find ourselves lost and unsure of the larger picture of God and our lives. I am convinced that nothing less than an understanding of Sabbath as a *command* from God, as well as an incredible invitation, will enable us to grab hold of this rope God offers us."²⁵⁹ What a gracious invitation we receive from the hospitable God in the weekly gift of Sabbath rest. Those who gratefully host God's Spirit by accepting this gift are deeply transformed and have a greater capacity to live a lifestyle of hospitality. As growing disciples gather together after a week of engaging in personal discipleship, they will be more ready to delight in Sabbath rest as a corporate body.

Hospitality to God includes spending time in spiritual practices so that we might learn to listen and wait for God in our everyday lives. God is a hospitable God and will infuse us with God's likeness as we spend time in God's presence. Apart from making hospitality to God a priority in our lives, we will not be transformed into hospitable people. Any church that is serious about correcting unfaithfulness to sound ecclesiology must teach and model hospitality to God as primary.

Hospitality to Self

Holistic hospitality also requires the offering of hospitality to oneself. That almost sounds like a contradiction in terms because we are used to thinking of hospitality as something we do for others. One of the often-overlooked broken relationships of Genesis 3 is the broken relationship with self that causes fear, shame and hiding. But God is an

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 151.

incredibly generous Host who allows us to welcome even ourselves on the path of hospitality. “In other words, God’s grace calls us to a ministry of hospitality, to welcoming the stranger in others, as well as in ourselves, into our midst.”²⁶⁰ In this journey of receiving God’s hospitality, we will learn that part of the gift of transformation occurs as we learn to love ourselves. “Few Christians make the connection between love of self and love of others. Sadly, many believe that taking care of themselves is a sin, a ‘psychologizing’ of the gospel taken from our self-centered culture.”²⁶¹ However, I propose that in order to love others profoundly we must first have applied God’s gracious gift of love to ourselves; we must love ourselves as God loves us. Scazzero seems to agree: “I truly believe the greatest gift we can give the world is our true self living in loving union with God. In fact how can we affirm other people’s unique identities when we don’t affirm our own? Can we really love our neighbors well without loving ourselves?”²⁶² The obvious answer here is no.

We are called into a lifestyle that models God’s love and hospitality. However, if we are to lay ourselves down for the sake of others, we must first have a “self” to lay down. “Jesus was not *selfless*. He did not live as if *only* other people counted. He knew his value and worth. He had friends. He asked people to help him. At the same time Jesus was not *selfish*. He did not live as if nobody else counted.”²⁶³ God’s hospitality to God inspires us to take care of ourselves too; “...self-care is never a selfish act – it is simply good stewardship of the only gift I have, the gift I was put on earth to offer others. Anytime we can listen to true self and give it the care it requires, we do it not only for ourselves, but for

²⁶⁰ Matthaei, *Formation In Faith*. Nashville, 33.

²⁶¹ Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, 35.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, 67.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, 57.

the many others whose lives we touch.”²⁶⁴ Holistic hospitality calls us to a lifestyle of surrender that includes our spirit, mind, and body. The church has done a good job of focusing on spiritual transformation, a fair job of talking about the transformation of the mind, but very little focus goes to the transformation of the body in faith formation. But “when we care for our bodies, we acknowledge the holiness of all of life and honor the fact that God is within us.”²⁶⁵ Our spirituality is intimately tied to our physicality and therefore an important piece in learning to be more faithful followers of Jesus. We are holistic beings called to a lifestyle of holistic hospitality. A Rule of Life that offers space to seriously consider the hospitality and care we offer our bodies is greatly needed.

Hospitality to self also requires care of our emotions. In his book, *Healing for Damaged Emotions*, Seamands offers the sad picture of a church that has been unable to tap into the deeper levels of emotional healing that the Spirit of God offers. He is talking about the scars that “are not touched by conversion and sanctifying grace or by the ordinary benefits of prayer.”²⁶⁶ He asserts that most churches assume that when a person comes to Christ, that is going to automatically correct all the emotional hurts and hang-ups they have and offer some type of an emotional shortcut. His call is for believers to extend grace to themselves, “so that we can compassionately live with ourselves and allow the Holy Spirit to work with special healing in our own hurts and confusion.”²⁶⁷ In essence, he is crying out for a holistic approach to discipleship that encompasses hospitality to self.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 35.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., 201.

²⁶⁶ David A. Seamands, *Healing for Damaged Emotions* (Colorado Springs, CO: Kingsway Communications, 2015), 14.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

Hospitality to self needs to be taught as an important piece of a discipleship model that desires to holistically affect the church and the individual. God offers us divine hospitality and as we receive it and become transformed by it, we will learn to see ourselves as part of God's valuable creation and treat ourselves (mind, spirit, body) with compassion as well. Holistic hospitality also includes hospitality to ourselves, and this includes the care of our bodies and emotions. Unless we have offered hospitality to ourselves, we will not be able to truly extend genuine hospitality to others. We can only give that which we have deeply experienced. When we love and care deeply for ourselves, we have greater capacity to engage in meaningful hospitality to others.

Hospitality to Others

In the previous sections we showed that holistic hospitality includes hospitality to God and to self. In this section we will show how hospitality to others is another important aspect of holistic hospitality and vital to our Christian walk. The grace that has been extended to us in God's hospitality becomes the core of not just our identity but of our vocation as disciples of Jesus. To offer hospitality to those within the church—to other followers of Christ—is imperative for Christian community; but what distinguishes Christians is our radical welcome to those who are different from us. In his Rule on hospitality, St. Benedict wrote, "Christ is still more received in the poor and in strangers."²⁶⁸ St. Benedict understood that to love Christ means that we learn to love those considered unlovable by the world's standards. This can be overwhelmingly difficult, however, having a Rule by which one commits to live is helpful and essential if we are

²⁶⁸ Böckmann, "Approaching Christ in the Rule of Benedict," 23.

serious about becoming transformed into the likeness of Jesus and intentional in hospitable living.

If we are to become hospitable Christians, like St. Benedict, we too must include in our Rule the underlying belief that the divine image is within every human person; therefore, they should be welcomed as if they were Christ Himself. Christian hospitality calls us to treat people with dignity, especially when they are acting in unreasonable ways or are broken by illness, addiction, or bad choices. A hospitable Christian who is being strengthened by a Rule will more likely begin to see hospitality as a way of life rather than just a task that needs to be checked off the list. Hospitable communities of faith will do the same.

Hospitality to others requires deeper surrender and personal growth. As we live out the call to emulate divine hospitality, we will find that some encounters and practices come easy and are rewarding—like when we offer hospitality to a person who is “deserving” and gracious or when we contribute to a cause that is close to our heart. We will, however, also be surprised to find that often the “other” can make us feel uncomfortable. Opportunities for hospitality are all around us and, at times, we will encounter internal resistance to the call of hospitality. Sometimes people who are different from us evoke anger or fear within us and, therefore, we struggle to extend hospitality to them or do so begrudgingly and at a distance. Interestingly, even these uncomfortable situations provide opportunities for growth. “By thoughtfully exploring the various possible reasons that underlie our personal discomfort, we may come face-to-face with some aspect of our own unresolved doubts from the past, our brokenness, sinfulness, and/or hardness of heart.”²⁶⁹ The constant

²⁶⁹ FitzGerald, “Hospitality,” 166.

offering of hospitality to God will allow us to remain open to extend hospitality to self and others; and in that process of surrender, we are offered many opportunities for personal growth and transformation.

In this section we have shown that holistic hospitality is essential in helping believers live faithful lives as disciples of Christ. Learning to extend hospitality to God, to self and others is vital if we hope to be personally transformed by the hospitality of God. And, just as our personal understanding of hospitality must be transformed to a holistic understanding in order for it to take root, so too, transforming the culture of a church to one that is hospitable will require an intentional structure. A personal and corporate Rule of Life that embodies holistic hospitality can help provide this structure. “We do not become good at hospitality in an instant; we learn it in small increments of daily faithfulness.”²⁷⁰ A Rule of Life aligns our values with our actions and provides accountability to our intentionality.

A Rule of Life must be integrated into the discipleship ministry of the church if it is to be an effective tool that helps shape the church corporately. An example of how this can be done is found in Appendix B (pages 24-30). Here, we offer a way for individuals to develop their own Rule of Life that encompasses holistic hospitality. But we also offer a method by which church teams or boards can develop a Rule of Life together that keeps them accountable for how they extend hospitality to God, to self, and others.

In this section we have demonstrated that developing a Rule of Life is important for hospitable living. Hospitable Christians that are being formed by a Rule of Life are

²⁷⁰ Pohl, “Hospitality, a practice and a way of life”, 37.

more likely to participate in the formation of churches that become communities of hospitality. A Rule of Life therefore is an effective tool for the shifting of ecclesial culture.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have offered a discipleship model based upon hospitality as a corrective to the unfaithfulness to sound ecclesiology that breeds racism, political idolatry, and a self-protecting attitude. A framework of hospitality provides not just transformative practices for local congregations in the 21st century to employ, but also a necessary and sound ecclesiology on which the church can base her discipleship ministry. We have seen in this chapter that hospitality is foundational to ecclesiology, that it leads from racism to reconciliation, from political idolatry to the confession that Jesus is King, and that it can transform a self-protecting mentality to a lifestyle of hospitable discipleship. We have also demonstrated how a discipleship model focused upon hospitality can begin to be applied in the local church and that a Rule of Life is an important discipline for a church to commit to who longs to shift ecclesial culture to faithfully reflect God's hospitality.

In the final chapter of this project, we move on to demonstrate that in order for ecclesial culture to remain focused on hospitality, faith communities must holistically approach hospitality and apply it to various ministries of the church in order to give believers an adequate orthopathy from which to operate. Just like individual followers of Christ must remain committed to a lifestyle of hospitality, churches must also remain intentional and committed and consistently offer corporate hospitality through the various ministries of the church. When a church is intentional about paying attention to the sociological, psychological, and spiritual needs of people, hospitality becomes a holistic approach that undergirds ministry. People who attend these types of hospitable churches

are better able to understand God's hospitality and they can thus grow in their capacity to extend to others what they have received from God and God's church. It is in the giving and receiving of hospitality that mindsets are transformed, people are free to give what they have so graciously received, and hospitable ecclesial culture is sustained. To this we now turn our attention.

CHAPTER 5: SUSTAINING AN ECCLESIAL CULTURE OF HOLISTIC HOSPITALITY

Introduction

In Chapter 3, we demonstrated that a framework of biblical hospitality is orthodox. The biblical narrative consistently reveals that God is, by nature, a hospitable God and that the mission of those who follow Christ is thus to reveal God's hospitality to the world. In Chapter 4, we demonstrated how ecclesial culture in a faith community can be corrected by means of orthopraxy (right practice) based upon hospitality. The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate that orthopathy (right experience) is also necessary for the correcting of unfaithfulness to sound ecclesiology. Holistic hospitality that models care and concern for the whole person in a faith community is also necessary in order to sustain an ecclesial culture of hospitality. Hospitality must pay attention to the important sociological, psychological, and spiritual needs of people so that once people have experienced hospitality, they will then be able to understand and live out an ecclesiology of hospitality towards others. A hospitality framework intentionally rewires the thinking of leaders in a faith community by consistently pulling us back to focus—not just on personal needs but on those of the community—to be faithful to God's hospitable character, and to live out the hospitable mission of Christ in the world today. This important mission, however, will not take place if it simply remains a good ideal; it is one that must be intentionally taught and modeled in the local church for the culture of a faith community to be deeply transformed by the reality of divine hospitality.

Through this chapter, I glean from the wisdom of a range of experts in the fields of sociology, psychology, and theology. In Part One, I will demonstrate how Christian hospitality must be concerned with the sociological needs of people, and that when people

feel they belong to a community and feel safe they are then able to participate in God's mission of reflecting that hospitality to others. In Part Two, I will demonstrate how hospitality requires us to be aware of the psychological needs of humanity; outside of knowing they are loved, heard and that they have value, people will be unable to reflect hospitality to others. In Part Three, I will demonstrate that people have spiritual needs such as having spiritual friends and adequate spiritual direction, and that a church who concerns itself with these needs is more capable of extending divine hospitality to others. Finally, in Part Four, I will demonstrate that the world needs to see radical hospitality from the church today. God's hospitality is "holistic and cares for the person's physical, emotional and spiritual needs,"²⁷¹ and God has already equipped the church to focus on these needs. By holistically engaging with her church members and emulating divine hospitality, a church models a mindset of missional hospitality. Churches founded on the hospitality of God and empowered by the Holy Spirit can produce faithful followers of Christ that embody the hospitality of God in their everyday lives and faithfully participate in her ecclesiology.

Part One: Holistic Hospitality and Sociological Needs

In this section, we will focus on three sociological needs of people: community, belonging, and safety. Divine hospitality helps meet these needs through the Holy Spirit, the openness of a local church to welcome diversity, and by providing safe places for people to share their fears and pain. When a faith community holistically operates to meet these needs corporately, they are modeling a hospitable approach and sustaining an ecclesial culture of hospitality.

²⁷¹ Smither, *Mission as Hospitality*, 117.

The Need for Community

In our highly individualistic culture, admitting that we have a deep insatiable need for community almost feels offensive or counterintuitive. However, individualism does not bring about the deep sense of satisfaction it promises; we need community. “It’s in our DNA. We need one another, plain and simple.”²⁷² The need for connection with a group of individuals beyond the self is a very real need that should be met in order for humans to thrive. Dean Ornish, M.D., provides scientific proof that this is true. He states, “We are creatures of community. Those individuals, societies, and cultures who learned to take care of each other, to love each other, and to nurture relationships with each other during the past several hundred thousand years were more likely to survive than those who did not.”²⁷³ Community and a sense of connection is, thus, imperative to our survival as a people.

The Need for Belonging

As relational creatures who are born helpless and require others to nurture and teach us, we will look to the community that shapes us to answer the profound “Who Am I?” and “Do I Belong?” questions of the soul. A desire to belong begins in childhood as we try to make sense of the ways we connect to and are perceived by others. The need to belong is so deep and innate that “we often try to acquire it by fitting in and by seeking approval.”²⁷⁴ When people do not experience healthy feelings of belonging within a community, “they will often find it in ways that are dark and destructive.”²⁷⁵ A sense of true belonging can shape our identity and allow individuals to contribute in healing ways into the life of the community; but a lack of belonging can also lead to acting out in violence, or “can be

²⁷² Born, *Deepening Community*, xviii.

²⁷³ Ornish, *Love & Survival*, 12.

²⁷⁴ Brown, *Braving the Wilderness*, 32.

²⁷⁵ Ornish, *Love & Survival*, 19.

distorted in ways that may lead to disease, despair, and darkness.”²⁷⁶ A lack of belonging leads to isolation and loneliness.

In a study on loneliness, researchers found that living with loneliness “increases our odds of dying early by 45%.”²⁷⁷ Likewise, other research shows that “anything that promotes a sense of isolation often leads to illness and suffering. Anything that promotes a sense of love and intimacy, connection and community, is healing.”²⁷⁸ These studies both show a similar finding: people who do not feel like they belong in community will not thrive as much as those who do. The need for belonging and community cannot be denied. A sense of true belonging fosters health, happiness, and even enables people to endure a profound amount of pain and suffering—and survive. A sense of “knowing that I belong” is the most common desire but also one of the least realized, for those who wish to build community.²⁷⁹

The Need for Safety

Another need humanity has is the need for safety. This need can also be filled in healthy or destructive ways and is born out of the fear of danger. The need for safety often leads people to choose like-minded individuals to befriend and with whom to belong. This also means that the temptation is to push people away who are different. However, seeking safety in this way has not “delivered that deep sense of belonging that we are hardwired to crave.”²⁸⁰ Sorting ourselves out by politics, beliefs, race, or anything else has not led to people feeling safe. “At the same time sorting is on the rise so is loneliness.”²⁸¹ Again, we

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ Brown, *Braving the Wilderness*, 55.

²⁷⁸ Ornish, *Love & Survival*, 14.

²⁷⁹ Born, *Deepening Community*, 56.

²⁸⁰ Brown, *Braving the Wilderness*, 51.

²⁸¹ Ibid.

arrive at the same conclusion: a lack of community, belonging, and safety leads to a deep sense of loneliness that can be toxic to the individual's body, soul, and spirit and to societies as a whole. When fulfilled, these needs ultimately "define ways of making meaning, belonging, security, and relationships that move us closer toward flourishing."²⁸² As a Spirit-empowered catalyst for life transformation, this leaves the church of the 21st century with wonderful opportunities to provide a place where people can flourish through Christian community, where they can find true belonging and safety in God and God's people, and join the mission of showing God's hospitable love to all of creation.

Experiences that Sustain an Ecclesial Culture of Hospitality

A philosophy of ministry founded upon the hospitality of God is a biblically faithful model for the local church as it seeks to become the flourishing community God has called it to be. When we approach ministry life with a posture of hospitality, "we are seeking a love that has the possibility to transform human relationships in such a way that it plants a seed, no matter how small, for larger social change."²⁸³ When, as believers who have been endowed with the Holy Spirit, we respond with a posture that represents God's hospitable posture towards humanity, we can expect true community to grow, a sense of belonging to be established, and a place of safety for people from all walks of life.

Community

When the Triune God invites us into community with Godself, we are being invited into the most beautiful and vibrant community: a community of love. Together as the body of Christ, we are called to reflect to the world what we learn and see among the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. When this happens, true and healing community is taking place.

²⁸² Holton, *Longing for Home*, 31.

²⁸³ Ibid., 185-186.

Throughout the years, the church has offered beautiful pictures of this holy community to the world; a clear picture found in Acts 2 portrays the growth and impact of the early church. People saw the way they interacted with one another and were drawn to this lifegiving community. However, it was not just about their good actions. Acts 2 begins with: “When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place” (2:1). Aside from the active work of the Holy Spirit, this kind of connectedness and living of life together is not possible; it becomes easily distorted and even dangerous.

A discipleship ministry that is grounded on the hospitality of God is primarily focused on offering hospitality to God’s Spirit. This entails waiting and listening to what God is saying to each particular church, and then following God into the picture of healthy community that each local church needs to represent, rather than chasing trends or programs. The Holy Spirit will lead congregations to deep community as they first open themselves up to receive God—and like Abraham (Genesis 18) and Martha and Mary (Luke 10)—offer hospitality to God. Outside of this, we will end up with poor substitutes to true community: “shallow community” or “fear-based community.”²⁸⁴ Christian community is a gift that Christ bestows upon “human beings in subjection to one another”²⁸⁵ by the power of His Spirit.

Belonging

We have previously stated that the human need for belonging with others is very profound. However, we also have an intense need to belong to God. “Feeling one’s belongingness to God is a real and urgent need.”²⁸⁶ Yet, even the longing for God is

²⁸⁴ Born, *Deepening Community*, 17.

²⁸⁵ Geoffrey Robert Beech, *The Elusive Ideal of Community* (Australia: Lifeworld Education, 2020), 38.

²⁸⁶ Holton, *Longing for Home*, 38.

evidence of the hospitality of the Holy Spirit in a human being before they even step foot in a church. The role of the church, then, is to foster what the Holy Spirit is already doing. To model divine hospitality is to disregard a one-size-fits-all approach to community life. We can best work alongside God's Spirit by offering several opportunities for belonging. God's Spirit can create a sense of belonging through various ministries. When we participate in a culture of hospitality, we will provide diverse options in which people can find belonging with God and others. Ministries founded upon the hospitality of God understand that it is God's Spirit who ultimately satisfies the need for belonging; the various methods or ministries become an instrument God can use.

A vivid and important way that God communicates to humanity that they belong with God is via the Eucharist. In Luke's Gospel, we see that Jesus takes the initiative in making preparations for the Passover meal. He takes His place as host with the apostles at the table. He offers them the "hospitality of God in a climactic way and institutes something (The Eucharist) that will sacramentally continue that hospitality in the life of the church."²⁸⁷ In this moment, Jesus states that He will not eat this meal again until it is "fulfilled" in the kingdom of God (Luke 22:15-16). Throughout His public ministry, Jesus had previously announced the imminence of the kingdom. Here in this sacred moment, Jesus lets His followers know that there will be a "'gap,' a time of absence created by his death." But participating continuously at the Lord's Table would be the "mode in which he will be present in the community during this space of time before the final establishment of the kingdom."²⁸⁸ The Eucharist is what enables the church to carry on in the name of

²⁸⁷ Brendan Byrne, *The Hospitality of God: A Reading of Luke's Gospel* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2015), 186.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 187.

Jesus and tangibly celebrate the hospitality of God that is at the center of God's mission. Jesus's body is broken in death so that humanity can find life and freedom in Him. His blood is poured out so that humanity can enter into God's covenant life. The Eucharist was always to be the way that humanity experiences the hospitality of God. As faith communities who long to be hospitable, we must understand the Eucharist itself as a sacred event that meets deep needs of belonging in the human heart. Jesus is mysteriously present in this moment and reminds people that they belong to Him. Therefore, we must aim to be inclusive in this act and not exclusive; and we must frame the story of God's hospitality each and every time we come to the Lord's Table and partake of His body and blood.

Safety

In a fear-stricken world, many people seek out the local church in an effort to feel safe. The hospitable church can utilize teams, small groups, classes, etc. as places where a deep sense of safety can develop. One way that sociologists suggest people feel safer in a large world is by forming smaller tribes or units. This can be done for positive reasons such as love or because of hate and suspicion of others.²⁸⁹ Small groups, bands, or teams within local churches can have the same effect; they can become places of safety and harness love and unity, or they can become divisive and destructive forces. A discipleship model committed to postures of hospitality provides safe space where people can open up to the "possibility of change and a deeper relational encounter with the other."²⁹⁰ But unless people feel safe, they will not connect deeply.

Recovery support groups lead the way in fostering a sense of safety in small group gatherings. They have a list of rules that is read prior to every meeting that helps foster

²⁸⁹ Ornish, *Love & Survival*, 14.

²⁹⁰ Holton, *Longing for Home*, 179.

safety in groups. These includes the expectation of confidentiality, a time limit in sharing, no crosstalk, no attempt to fix one another, etc. These rules help set up healthy expectations for participants and communicate that it is a safe place to share because there will be no judgment. A discipleship model that longs to extend divine hospitality would do well to set up rules for their small group sharing to foster safety.

A discipleship ministry that meets the sociological needs of people—for healthy community, belonging, and safety—is participating with God’s Spirit to bring about a transformational mindset into a local church that embodies the hospitality of God. This can happen as people experience firsthand how leaders are first hospitable to God’s Spirit—the only One who can bring about true community; as they experience a church where several opportunities for belonging are present, and they learn the value of diversity and openness to the needs of the “other”; and as they participate in small groups where they feel safe to share their pain and fears. When people experience the hospitality of God in local churches, and their needs for healthy community, belonging, and safety are met, they are then able to give to others what they have seen modeled and what they have received. This is how the ecclesial culture of hospitality becomes deeply rooted and is sustained; when church leaders intentionally model an approach to ministry that is holistic and cares about the whole person. In this section we have looked at the sociological needs that churches must be concerned with; but a church must also concern herself with the psychological needs of people if they hope to offer holistic hospitality as a model of ministry. To this we now turn our attention.

Part Two: Holistic Hospitality and Psychological Needs

The church is to be a primary vehicle for people's overall growth and maturity. "Humans move from basic physiological needs to psychological and moral ones..." to "spiritual needs"²⁹¹; and the hospitable Spirit of God has already provided the gifts and graces within the body of Christ for those needs to be addressed. For far too long we have focused solely on the spiritual needs of people and left emotional needs to the psychologists. However, both the spiritual and emotional needs of people are to be tended to by the people of God and are "inseparably linked and critical to a full biblical discipleship."²⁹² In this section, I assert that the discipleship ministry of a church based on holistic hospitality can meet some deep psychological needs of individuals—such as the need to be loved, the need to be heard, and the need for self-esteem—and can, thus, contribute towards the embodiment of divine hospitality in the local church.

The Need for Love

In an article titled "Freudian Slips: Live Loved," McConnell tackles the intersection between psychology and theology and asserts that "love lies at the heart of our humanity and of God's divinity."²⁹³ The need to be loved is intense and of utmost importance for the human; we long to be connected to an "other," and this need is "universal and is as legitimate as physical hunger and as vital for our psychological well-being as food is for our physical well-being."²⁹⁴ However, though we were made for connection by a loving God, "we are not born into connection because we live in a fallen world, it has to be gained,

²⁹¹ Carmen Mele. "An Answer to Longing and Solitude: A look at longing as part of the human condition." *The Priest* (January 2021). www.thepriest.com.

²⁹² Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Church*, 19.

²⁹³ McConnell, "Freudian Slips," 28.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

and it is an arduous, developmental process.”²⁹⁵ The need for love is innate, intense, and must be tended to in order for humans to grow as they were created to.

A process of healthy attachment and bonding is necessary for humans to thrive in life. “Without going through that process of bonding, we are doomed to alienation and isolation. Not only do we not grow, we deteriorate.”²⁹⁶ The need to be loved is a God-given need, and our desire to be attached in relationships is normal; it “remains with us throughout our lives, and is not some childhood dependency that we outgrow.”²⁹⁷ In research done with heart patients, doctors included in their treatment training on becoming more loving and trusting. They conclude that “a person's ability to love and connect with others lays the foundation for both psychological and physical health.”²⁹⁸ This research illustrates that being in loving relationships leads to overall health and growth, while isolation leads to sickness and death. Love is a powerful agent for healing and wholeness.

The Need to be Heard

When we feel loved and rightly attached to someone, “it provides a secure base from which to explore the world.”²⁹⁹ Exploration of the world involves learning to communicate; to listen and to be listened to; to be heard. When as children we fall and hurt ourselves, it is the retelling of our story of how we got hurt, and a word of compassion or empathy from someone that typically does the best job in soothing the pain. In his book titled *Listening to Killers*, Garberino, a psychological expert witness in murder cases, speaks to the intense need that humans have of being heard. His job is to “listen to

²⁹⁵ Henry Cloud, *Changes That Heal*, 50.

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

²⁹⁷ McConnell, “Freudian Slips,” 1.

²⁹⁸ Henry Cloud, *Changes That Heal*, 54.

²⁹⁹ McConnell, “Freudian Slips,” 1.

killers.”³⁰⁰ He asserts that listening in his line of duty is “hard to do...but we have to do it if we are going to progress in understanding and preventing killing in America.”³⁰¹ When people are not heard, when their voices are scuffed out due to lack of health in their family of origin, oppression, violence, or abuse of some kind, dissociation is possible. Dissociation is dangerous and leads to crimes of all kinds; listening breaks the cycle of dissociation. The need to be heard within the confines of a safe relationship is an intense need that humanity has and, when tended to well, can also lead to healing and wholeness in individuals.

The Need for Self-Esteem

Along with the need to be loved and to be heard, having a healthy self-esteem is also important to human flourishing. The components needed for a healthy sense of self include: a sense of belongingness, a sense of worth and value, and a sense of being competent.³⁰² As we have previously seen, humanity has an innate need to connect deeply; a feeling of dissociation or lack of bonding can lead people, “to believe they are not worthy of love and are not able to trust others, often resulting in low self-esteem.”³⁰³ Self-esteem not only affects one’s feelings but also behaviors. The enemy of the human soul knows self-esteem is a great need and uses it against us. “Satan’s greatest psychological weapon is a gut-level feeling of inferiority, inadequacy, and low self-worth.”³⁰⁴ With an unhealthy view of self, humanity will quickly deteriorate and become far less than created to be by a loving God who calls us each “beloved.”

³⁰⁰ James Garbarino, *Listening to Killers: Lessons Learned from My Twenty Years as a Psychological Expert Witness in Murder Cases* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2015), 226.

³⁰¹ Ibid.

³⁰² Seamands, *Healing for Damaged Emotions*, 71-72.

³⁰³ McConnell, “Freudian Slips,” 1.

³⁰⁴ Seamands, *Healing for Damaged Emotions*, 58.

Experiences that Sustain an Ecclesial Culture of Hospitality

Needs that are not met in healthy ways can lead humanity down paths of destruction and into cycles of brokenness that are passed on from generation to generation. The church has the great task to intersect the needs of humanity with the loving hospitality of God. Psychologist Larry Crabb offers an earthshattering statement when he says, “psychological problems at root are spiritual problems.”³⁰⁵ He goes on to say that most of the emotional problems experienced by people in churches today can be solved through mature Christians who love, listen, and encourage others. The Holy Spirit has already provided for the church what she needs to meet the needs of others. God can use a discipleship ministry based on the hospitality of God to help believers meet the emotional needs of other believers and to transform the culture of a church to one that embodies divine hospitality.

Love

We were created in the image of a relational and loving God; therefore, love is the essence of the Christian faith. The Trinity enjoys a deeply safe relational community and invites us to imitate that love and safety in our relationships with others. “This self-giving love of the Trinity is what heals the broken attachment between us and God and between us and our neighbor.”³⁰⁶ Ministry rooted in the hospitality of God can be a safe place of attachment for people, where dissociation and lack of bonding can be healed. “People who can't make emotional attachments live in a state of perpetual hunger.”³⁰⁷ The hospitality God offers feeds the souls of people through the love found in the body of Christ. Hospitable leaders will, therefore, love individuals more than they love programs.

³⁰⁵ Crabb, *The Safest Place on Earth*, 180.

³⁰⁶ McConnell, “Freudian Slips,” 2.

³⁰⁷ Henry Cloud, *Changes That Heal*, 61-62.

The Apostle Paul can be described as the best disciple-maker who ever lived. His ministry model was one of relationships; we see this reflected in his letters: “he was writing very personal correspondence to specific people in specific places about specific situations...he was writing to friends, fellow ministers...”; he was writing to people he cared deeply about and loved.³⁰⁸ Disciples grow from relationships; therefore, a small group ministry based on the hospitality of God offers genuine love in community. People are not a means to an end; a philosophy of hospitality understands that love is the highest ethic because it embodies the love of the Trinity. A hospitable church is a prime place for us to become “radically other-centered”³⁰⁹ again.

Being Heard

A ministry of loving hospitality is an incarnational ministry where Jesus becomes real to people through the “skin” of the church. “People today are desperate for ‘skin’—to be loved, for someone to Incarnate with them.”³¹⁰ The desperation of people is seen in their willingness to pay over \$100 an hour for a psychologist to enter their world and listen to them. “Today, God still has physical skin and can be seen, touched, heard, and tasted...through his body, the church, in whom he dwells.”³¹¹ To reflect God in small group ministry is to be a people who listen well to the stories, the joys, and the needs of other people. The Gospels are filled with account of Jesus’s interactions with individuals; we find that He listened. “He was present, never in a rush or distracted. He took the time to explore stories.”³¹² Hospitality-based ministry enjoys more than good conversation or

³⁰⁸ Heather Zemple, *Community is Messy: The Perils and Promise of Small Group Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 91.

³⁰⁹ Crabb, *The Safest Place on Earth*, 89.

³¹⁰ Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Church*, 183.

³¹¹ Ibid.

³¹² Ibid., 190.

fellowship; it participates in attentive and reflective listening. “Basic conversational skills are an important dimension of Christian charity: possibly the most important way of attending to guests.”³¹³ If we are to become hospitable people, our ministry settings must foster environments where people intentionally listen to one another.

Self-Esteem

Feelings of low self-worth and esteem shackle many Christians even when they have great faith, knowledge in God’s Word, and wonderful spiritual experiences. Poor self-image keeps people, “tied up in knots, bound by terrible feelings of inferiority, and chained to a deep sense of worthlessness.”³¹⁴ A discipleship ministry centered upon holistic hospitality can extend grace and help meet this important need in people. First, the best thing for people struggling with self-esteem is to *avoid being alone*. Left to their own thoughts and feelings, depression and alienation are sure to reign. Small groups or ministry teams based upon God’s hospitality will provide safe spaces for people to have the ability to connect with others and not journey alone. Second, *seeking help from others* is important if people are to arrive at a healthy view of themselves. Again, hospitable groups can allow for openness and transparency that makes it easier for people to reach out for help. Third, *leaning heavily on God’s Word* is a powerful means by which one can center their self-worth. A hospitable discipleship ministry will offer various options for people to connect to God’s Word alongside other believers. And finally, self-esteem can ultimately be healed as a *person learns to rest in the presence of God’s Spirit within them*.³¹⁵ Churches that are

³¹³ Marilyn Chandler McEntyre, “My House, God’s House: Hospitality is not merely good manners but a ministry of healing,” *Christianity Today* 45, no. 6 (April 2001), 104, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2001/april23/30.104.html>.

³¹⁴ Seamands, *Healing for Damaged Emotions*, 58.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 153-154.

focused on extending hospitality will consistently welcome people with low self-esteem into their midst as if they were Christ Himself, thus treating people as the image-bearers that they are, even before they see that in themselves. By being hospitable churches, we teach people to lift their “head high as a son or daughter of God.”³¹⁶ What a privilege we have to partner with God in the reprogramming and renewal process of people’s minds and self-esteem.

In this section we have demonstrated that in hospitable churches, Christians uniquely meet the needs of others by modeling Trinitarian love in their relationships, by listening intentionally to others, and by focusing on the immeasurable value and worth in each human being. By doing this, churches are providing opportunities for participants and guests to see, hear, taste, touch, and smell the hospitality of God. When divine hospitality is received through the ministries of a church, the capacity of people to understand and to reflect that hospitality to others begins to grow and an ecclesial culture of hospitality is sustained. We now move on to discuss the spiritual needs that a church who embodies holistic hospitality will also be concerned about.

Part Three: Holistic Hospitality and Spiritual Needs

The Trinity is a perfect community where nothing is lacking; our universe flows and functions out of the love of the Trinity. God’s loving intention in creating humanity was so that we could “become part of their community, and thus to live in harmony with one another and with the whole Creation.”³¹⁷ The deepest spiritual desire of the human heart is to experience union with the Triune God; however, “apart from human

³¹⁶ Ibid., 90.

³¹⁷ William Barry, *Spiritual Direction and the Encounter with God* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2004), 57.

community,” that need will not be satisfied.³¹⁸ The church, then, becomes a necessary means that God uses in salvation and to fill the spiritual needs and longings of the human heart. In this section, we will explore the spiritual needs of connection with God via spiritual friendship and spiritual direction and how a framework of holistic hospitality will concern itself with these needs and thus help sustain an ecclesial culture focused on emulating divine hospitality.

The Need for Spiritual Friendship

In our cry for union with God, the human heart will also long “to participate in spiritual community, to engage in spiritual conversations” and to co-journey with others.³¹⁹ This yearning is for a safe place where friendships with other people who are hungry for God can grow. The innate need to experience the supernatural leads people to desire belonging within a community where they know “what it means to sense the Spirit moving.”³²⁰ Humans who are aware of their spiritual needs long for more than relationships that are simply focused on improving each other’s lives, but for spiritual friends with whom to grow and live life. People want to “know and be known in conversations”³²¹ that are not just focused on personal issues but on Christ Himself. Spiritual friendships fill this great need because they provide a “wonderful kind of togetherness where each of the friends encourages and liberates each other into the fullness of their own potential.”³²² We are not meant to journey through life alone. Even Saint Ignatius had a small band of “friends in the Lord” who filled this need in his life; he considered “friendship as an essential part of

³¹⁸ Ibid.

³¹⁹ Crabb, *The Safest Place on Earth*, 19.

³²⁰ Ibid.

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² John O’Donohue, *Walking in Wonder: Eternal Wisdom for a Modern World* (New York, NY: Convergent, 2015), 13.

his life.”³²³ A desire for friends in the Lord is a spiritual longing that God has equipped the church to fulfill.

The Need for Spiritual Direction

In the human search for God and authentic relationship with other believers, what the soul needs is a “spiritual caregiver” who can address the “God longing” inside of us.³²⁴ We need someone to listen with us to what God may be saying in the midst of our personal life experiences. This need can be satisfied by the ministry of spiritual direction. The spiritual director is a host who bestows “guest-friendship.” This ministry is one of hospitality; as the spiritual director in the “truest and deepest sense” becomes a reflection of the “abundant hospitality shown by the Host at the heavenly banquets.”³²⁵ The spiritual director comes “alongside another who seeks God’s direction for living”³²⁶; and provides a “hospitable space of time for the other to reflect upon the spiritual quest.”³²⁷ To listen to another’s soul in their disclosure and discovery may be the greatest service that any “human being ever performs for another.”³²⁸ When all the layers have been stripped away, God is what people want and need the most. However, walking the spiritual journey with someone who listens well to the leading of God also fills a deep spiritual need in the hearts of people.

³²³ James Martin, *The Jesuit Guide to Almost Everything: A Spirituality for Real Life* (New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 2012), 237.

³²⁴ Reed, *Quest for Spiritual Community*, 58.

³²⁵ Margaret Guenther, *Holy Listening: The Art of Spiritual Direction* (Lanham, MD: Cowley Publications, 1992), 10.

³²⁶ Reed, *Quest for Spiritual Community*, 9.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, 37.

³²⁸ *Ibid.*, 37-38.

Experiences that Sustain an Ecclesial Culture of Hospitality

God has gifted and equipped the church to join God in meeting the spiritual needs of people. Creating opportunities for people to connect in smaller groups within a church can be a meaningful practice for the congregation that is yearning to embody God's hospitality. It is in this setting that spiritual friendships can grow, spiritual directors can be developed, and transformation can happen.

Spiritual Friendships

In John 15:12-13, Jesus commands His followers to emulate His example and to “love one another” to the point of laying down their life for their friends. Jesus was a master teacher, healer, preacher, and friend. Like all humans, Jesus needed friends in life; the Bible shows that He welcomed people in a variety of spaces. In *public spaces*, He invited large crowds of people to sit with Him as He shared a meal with them. We find Him in *social spaces*, like at the wedding in Cana at Galilee, interacting with friends and family. In *private spaces*, we see Him traveling with His twelve disciples. And in *intimate spaces*, we find Him bearing His soul at Gethsemane to His closest friends: Peter, James, and John. Jesus models the need for friends in all spaces: public, social, private, and intimate.³²⁹

Small groups grounded upon God's hospitality should emulate Jesus when it comes to spiritual friendships. Providing opportunities for people to connect in *public* and *social* spaces within a small group might include facilitating events such as concerts or sporting events, having meals together, or serving side by side in the community. A philosophy of ministry founded on God's hospitality, however, takes it further and provides space for

³²⁹ Joseph Myers, *The Search to Belong: Rethinking Intimacy, Community and Small Groups* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003).

people to grow in *private* and *intimate* friendships and depends on the Holy Spirit to empower community. This requires risky hospitality in the sharing of one's very soul with another; but if we are to follow the path of the Spirit, then we must be willing to turn our chairs and face a "small community of friends." It is in the act of facing one another that we "find the power of God's Spirit" to make community happen.³³⁰

The need for spiritual friendship is deep and wide. Jesus modeled it best by having friends in all spaces; and yet His need for friendship with a close few cannot be denied. We also need intimate connection with a few (two or three) close friends with whom we can be our truest self and to whom we can bare our soul in our own gardens of Gethsemane. Small groups based upon the hospitality of God recognize this intense longing in the human spirit and prayerfully facilitate environments where friendships (in all spaces) can naturally develop. The Spirit of God is the only One who can make supernatural connections happen among humans; but in hospitality-centered congregations, we also strive to create an environment that is both hospitable to God's Spirit and to others.

Spiritual Direction

Since its inception, the Wesleyan movement could be identified by its disciplined care of souls. John Wesley himself matured under the spiritual direction of his own mother, Susanna. Wesley created societies, classes, and bands so that *every* member could sit under communal spiritual direction. The need to have different groups and different rules for each group emerged from the understanding that the intensity of people's spiritual needs varies from person to person. "In the Wesleyan movement, persons could move from one group

³³⁰ Crabb, *The Safest Place on Earth*, xiv.

into a more stringent one—from classes, to bands, to select societies.”³³¹ Wesley was amazed by what he saw happening through the spiritual direction operating in these groups. He understood that being a Christian required spiritual companionship on the journey and offered inclusive hospitality by forming a variety of groups for people to choose from which all included spiritual direction and soul care of some sort.

Spiritual directors aspire to reflect Christ’s love. Therefore, “they take on the risk of hospitality”³³² as they look at others with the “conviction that God has placed something terrific in each member.”³³³ Spiritual directors who are hospitable to God’s Spirit and to others “can see it, call it forth, and enjoy it.”³³⁴ When this happens, a transformational miracle is taking place through spiritual community. “Spiritual community is always a miracle. It never happens without the Spirit.”³³⁵ The ministry of spiritual direction can take place one-on-one or within a small group of people. However, it hardly ever happens within the life of the church outside of people connecting with each other through small group ministry where they can grow in friendship and trust. When we invite God’s hospitable Spirit to lead people to connect with others and spiritual direction takes place, people can be touched in deep and life-changing ways.

Depending on the hospitable God to meet the needs for spiritual friendships and spiritual direction in people while also working to emulate divine hospitality can deeply affect and transform the culture of a church. When church leaders under the conviction of God begin to intentionally model divine hospitality because they firmly believe it is the

³³¹ Paul Jones, *The Art of Spiritual Direction: Giving and Receiving Spiritual Guidance* (Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 2002), 79.

³³² Guenther, *Holy Listening*, 30.

³³³ Crabb, *The Safest Place on Earth*, 98.

³³⁴ Ibid.

³³⁵ Ibid.

vocation of the church and, therefore, they faithfully teach this, it will—through the power of the Holy Spirit—begin to be embodied by others and contagiously become the culture that guides that community of believers. It requires both the power of the Holy Spirit and intentionality from the leaders. In this section, we have demonstrated that holistic hospitality that cares about the spiritual needs of people is modeling an ecclesial culture of hospitality. Being concerned with the needs of people and finding ways to engage with those needs is what allows a church to be a model of hospitality and for an ecclesial culture of hospitality to be lived out by a faith community.

Living a lifestyle of hospitality inside and outside of the walls of the church will take intentionality and will be costly. Jesus' call is to radical hospitality and following that call is demanding. But that radical hospitality is attractive and healing to a world so polarized and inhospitable. We will conclude this chapter by pointing to that kind of radical hospitality that helps a church model and sustain an ecclesial culture of hospitality and allows her to be a faithful witness in the world.

Part Four: Experiences of Radical Hospitality Sustain an Ecclesial Culture of Hospitality

Through the scope of this project, we have demonstrated that unfaithfulness to sound ecclesiology that focuses on self-preservation leads to pervasive attitudes of hostility within the church particularly manifested in racism and political idolatry. We have also demonstrated that faithful ecclesiology built upon divine hospitality is the necessary framework for churches who long to emulate the holiness of God in the world. We understand that hospitality is at the heart of Christianity since no one has ever been more radically hospitable than Jesus who took on human flesh to extend God's welcome to us.

In this project, we have focused on shifting the culture of a local congregation and primarily focused on how hospitality shapes those within the body of Christ. However, many questions remain. Can hospitality reach the brokenness of humanity? Can hospitality transform people on the fringes inside of the church and attract people outside of the church? What do we do when hospitality feels insufficient in ministering to people with mental illness, substance addiction, or those with poor boundaries? What happens when people's physical, sociological, psychological, and spiritual needs are so vast that they are overwhelming the church? The scope of these questions could become a different project altogether. However, before concluding this project, it is important that we begin to address how hospitality can minister to the brokenness of humanity and to those not yet part of the Christian church. To this end, in this section, we will demonstrate that radical hospitality is the distinguishing factor of Christianity and an important witness in the world today. An intentional commitment to holistic and radical hospitality ensures that an ecclesial culture of hospitality remains primary.

The Distinguishing Factor of Christianity: Radical Hospitality

Since the first century, a distinguishing factor of Christian hospitality has been the focus on welcoming the poor, vulnerable, and broken into community. Based on Jesus's identification with the broken stranger in Matthew 25:35 and His teaching in Luke 14:12-14 on the necessity of including "the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind," the first century church understood that hospitality was not just about welcoming family, friends, and influential acquaintances. They understood that "Christian hospitality ought to focus on welcoming the vulnerable and the poor into one's home and community of faith."³³⁶

³³⁶ Pohl, "Hospitality, a practice and a way of life", 35.

This kind of hospitality reflects “God’s greater hospitality” that welcomes those that are undeserving, and provides the lonely with a home, and sets a banquet table before the hungry.³³⁷ Generous hospitality towards the poor and needy distinguished the early church from the way the rest of the world viewed and understood hospitality. Early Christianity offered a picture of radical hospitality to the world.

Over the years, hospitals and hospices were established to further care for the needs of people and though this was an incredible benefit to society as a whole, this distanced hurting people from a local body of believers. The radical hospitality that had been understood to be a distinguishing mark of Christianity was relegated to paid workers. “As a result, the best resources that individual Christians and churches have to offer to the most vulnerable people are often least available.”³³⁸ Healthy churches that should be safe places for “those who are poor, refugees, homeless, have significant disabilities, or are gravely ill”³³⁹ rarely feel that is their task anymore, because of the vast number of social service agencies that work to meet those needs. However, God’s gracious hospitality calls us to continue to seek out ways to extend welcome to those we can and who are often overlooked: low-income people in our local communities, elderly people, alienated teens, international students, immigrants, homeless neighbors, people seeking rehabilitation at local agencies, etc. “Followers of Jesus have a rich tradition within which to respond, if we could only recognize how important our welcome is.”³⁴⁰ The distinguishing factor of Christianity is still radical hospitality, and it will be hard and costly.

³³⁷ Ibid., 36.

³³⁸ Ibid.

³³⁹ Ibid.

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

Hospitality could be described as the best and the hardest thing that one will ever do. It is the best thing because through acts of hospitality we become aligned with the character of God and often sense God's presence in the practice. However, hospitality is also difficult and takes hard work; the work of hospitality is impossible to measure in effectiveness and is never done. One of the hardest things about hospitality is that it takes more than good intentions; it usually requires the use of physical resources, and we all are limited in what we can give. I believe every Christian person desires to be hospitable, but often we do not think we have enough energy, money, food, space, time, etc. Hospitality will be too daunting of a task for anyone who longs to reflect the heart of God until we understand it to be more than a task; it must become a way of gratefully living our lives and sharing ourselves for the sake of those God loves deeply.

In the work of radical hospitality, we understand that in God's kingdom there is enough—there is abundance even—but we also understand that to be human means that we live with limited resources. We must come to terms with the fact that we cannot respond to every need, and that there will be some people that are turned away. “Good hosts allow the wideness of God's mercy and the generosity of God's welcome to frame their thinking about limits and boundaries.”³⁴¹ Though we cannot meet every need, we can meet some needs and we must posture ourselves close to God the Gracious Host so that we do not miss the opportunities of radical hospitality God will empower us to fulfill.

Radical hospitality ultimately welcomes people home, to God's family, and it desires healing and wholeness in the humanity it serves. However, hospitality must never be considered a means to an end. “When we use hospitality as a tool, we distort it, and the

³⁴¹ Ibid., 42.

people we welcome know quickly that they are being used.”³⁴² Though as followers of Christ, we understand that the journey of discipleship with Jesus is what ultimately satisfies the longings of the human heart and gives people the ability to live abundant lives despite differing circumstances, and we want people to join our churches and become faithful followers of Jesus; we do not extend hospitality so that they will convert to our religion or take on our set of beliefs. That can indeed be an outcome of hospitality, and clear pictures of this were seen throughout church history. However, we understand that God’s desire is the formation of a hospitable people who emulate God’s love and holiness in the world.

God is in charge of transforming people’s hearts; we just get to be the vehicle by which that transformation can come about. Love is still the greatest change agent in the world. We are not responsible for the growth, the conversion, or the sustainability of the church as an institution; we are to freely live as followers of Christ, reflecting His heart in the world. God has given us all that we need for this task: the Holy Spirit, prayer, grace, spiritual intuition, wisdom, skills, etc. “Good hosts discover the divine mystery in hospitality – that as they welcome strangers, they are themselves beloved guests of God’s grace.”³⁴³ Understanding ourselves as beloved guests of God is what propels us to go out and do likewise. This shifts and sustains the culture of the faith community in which hospitable believers are being formed. These churches become obsessed with showing hospitality to not just one another but those on the fringes of society, and God’s presence is evident in their midst. Radical hospitality does the important work of welcoming people home even if they never step foot in our churches. It is in staying radically committed to

³⁴² Ibid.

³⁴³ Ibid., 43.

postures of holistic hospitality that correct ecclesial culture is sustained and that faithfulness to sound ecclesiology is lived out.

Conclusion

God met the needs of humanity by sending Christ to heal the sick, feed the hungry, and proclaim the good news of salvation to all. God is most hospitable to us through the person of Jesus Christ and through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, but God cares for more than just the spiritual needs of people; God loves the whole person. Humanity has many deeply rooted needs that require connection with God and others. When we live with disregard to any “aspect of what it means to be a fully human person made in the image of God,” it carries with it “catastrophic, long-term consequences” for our relationships with God, self, and others.³⁴⁴ In this chapter, I have demonstrated that an intentional discipleship model that meets sociological, psychological, and spiritual needs and that engages in radical hospitality is necessary to sustaining ecclesial culture that embodies divine hospitality.

In Part One, we asserted that divine hospitality meets the sociological needs for *community* through the work of the Holy Spirit; for *belonging* through allowing space for diversity of needs and through the Eucharist; and for *safety* through establishing hospitable spaces for people to feel free to open up and share with others. In Part Two, we demonstrated that divine hospitality meets the psychological needs of individuals to be genuinely *loved*, to be intentionally *heard*, and of *self-esteem*. In Part Three, we determined that divine hospitality provides for the primary spiritual needs of individuals who desire *spiritual friendship* and *spiritual direction*. In Part Four, we looked at radical hospitality as

³⁴⁴ Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Church*, 54.

a faithful witness in the world today. Through each part of this chapter, we demonstrated that corporate commitment to holistic hospitality is the way that an ecclesial culture focused on hospitality can be sustained.

Project Conclusion

In Chapter 1 of this project, we outlined the problem of unfaithfulness to sound ecclesiology that leads to the inhospitable sins of racism, political idolatry, and self-protection. As committed followers of Christ who eagerly anticipate participating in what God is doing in the world, we must start from a place of adequate ecclesiology because, “what we believe about God will tell us what we believe about people; and what we believe about people will tell us what kinds of communities and societies we believe we should strive to create.”³⁴⁵ Unfaithfulness to sound ecclesiology is a grave problem because it has marred the witness of the Christian church and left local congregations grasping for ways to reverse the current and dire situation. The aim of this project was to find a path forward in correcting the inhospitality that has infiltrated many of our churches that stands contrary to a faithful ecclesiology. In Chapter 2, we provided an extensive literature review that demonstrated the well-researched pathway that leads to hospitality as the corrective for the current inhospitality bred by unfaithfulness to sound ecclesiology but also demonstrated a gap in prevailing models that leaves space for the creation of a discipleship model based upon hospitality.

In Chapter 3, we focused on orthodoxy and provided the first building block to the thesis of this project: that hospitality is a biblically and theologically sound framework upon which to build the discipleship life of the church. When it comes to the topic of

³⁴⁵ Brenda Salter McNeil, *Roadmap to Reconciliation: Moving Communities into Unity, Wholeness and Justice* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2015), 23.

biblical hospitality there is no lack of resources available; from cover to cover, the Bible is replete with the theme of hospitality. Because God is a hospitable God in nature and character, hospitality also becomes a faithful model upon which to build practical ecclesiology. Hospitality is biblically sound but also a faithful witness in history. Hospitality was lived out so powerfully in the early church that it became “the means whereby the sinner, the outcast, and even the enemy encountered God’s hospitality and were transformed into friends who were fully included as God’s people.”³⁴⁶ When it comes to historical hospitality we must engage with Benedictine spirituality. Benedictine spirituality has greatly influenced notions of Christian hospitality and offered hope for the Christian church for over fifteen hundred years. It serves as a witness that hospitality—when intentionally offered—can survive the trends, fads, and programs each generation turns to for answers. In this chapter we demonstrated that we do not have to reinvent the wheel when it comes to the concept of hospitality. Scripture is a useful and inspired resource; also, St. Benedict’s *Rule* has been a proven and useful tool for putting God’s inspired mandate of Christian hospitality into action within a faith community. Hospitality is a biblically and theologically sound and necessary framework upon which to build the discipleship life of the church.

In Chapter 4, we focused on orthopraxy and developed another building block to the thesis of this project: that hospitality can be utilized as a discipleship approach in faith communities to overcome unfaithfulness to sound ecclesiology because it is foundational to sound ecclesiology and it helps shift a local church from racism to reconciliation, from political idolatry to the confession that Jesus is Lord, and from a self-protecting mentality

³⁴⁶ Jipp, *Saved by Faith and Hospitality*, 37.

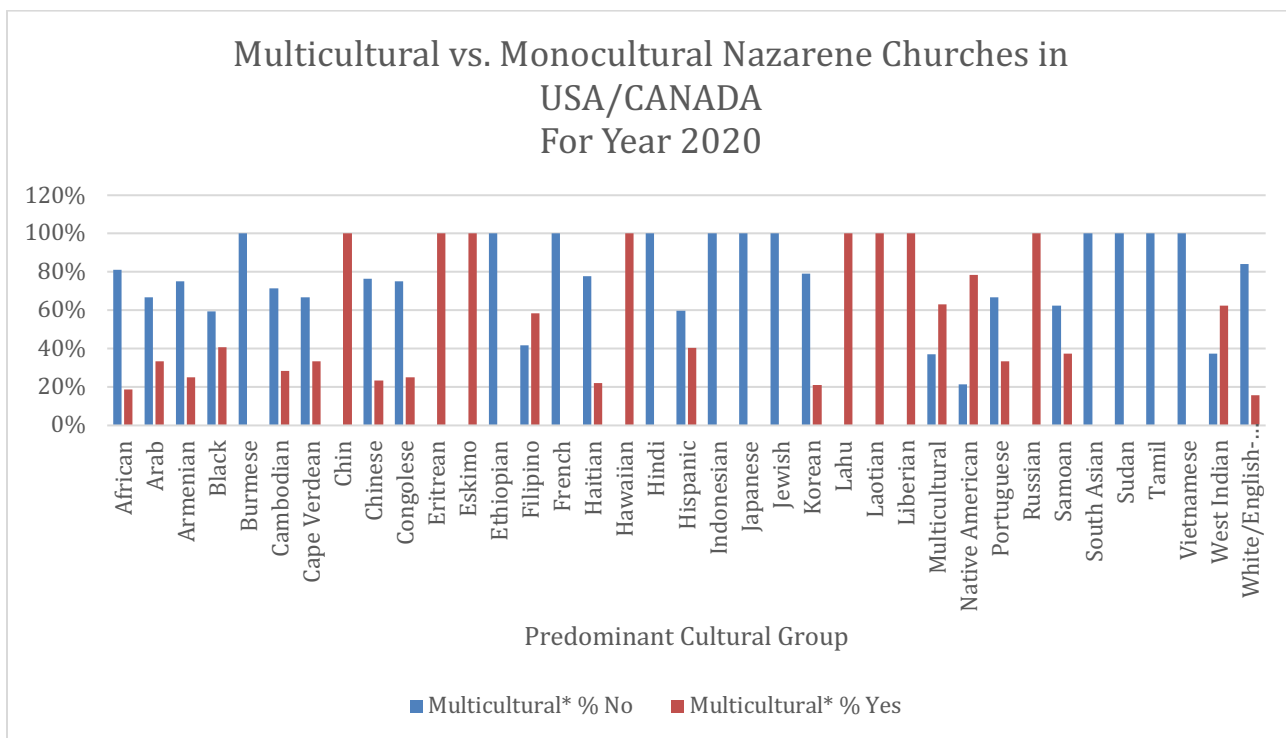
into a lifestyle of hospitable discipleship. Hospitality is the aim of discipleship, and they share a common framework based on: peculiarity, obedience, surrender and holiness. A model of discipleship based on holistic hospitality overcomes faulty ecclesiology and leads to reconciliation, declaring allegiance only to Christ, and a commitment to a lifestyle of discipleship. A faith community can begin to apply this model of discipleship by evaluating church practices by the measure of the framework of hospitality and by developing a corporate Rule of Life focused on intentional hospitality to God, self, and others.

In Chapter Five, we focused on orthopathy and offered the last building block to our thesis: that an ecclesial culture of holistic hospitality can be molded and sustained in faith communities by focusing on sociological, psychological, and spiritual needs. A discipleship framework based on divine hospitality is essential for a church that longs to be faithful to embody God's ecclesiology. In emulating God in the giving and receiving of hospitality, Christians experience it for themselves, gain a deeper understanding of it, and then grow in their capacity to reflect God's hospitality to others. We can only give that which we have graciously received. God meets our needs through God's hospitality and empowers us to go and do likewise.

It has been my desire throughout this project to demonstrate that hospitality is a necessary framework upon which to build the discipleship life of the church. We cannot be faithful followers of Christ without being hospitable Christians. To be formed into the likeness of Jesus is to be like Him in the way we live our lives. The aim of discipleship is hospitable living in the world that emulates the heart of God. Churches must become intentional about modeling this type of discipleship living in the way they think about and live out church practices. This is the way for ecclesial culture focused upon hospitality to

be sustained for generations to come. Hospitable churches committed to faithful discipleship living are what the world needs most; may the 21st century church be true to the hospitable mission of God and sensitive to the day in which she is living; and may those who come behind us find us faithful.

APPENDIX A: Multicultural vs. Monocultural Nazarene Churches Year 2020



Predominant Cultural Group	# of Churches	Multicultural*	
		% No	% Yes
African	16	81%	19%
Arab	6	67%	33%
Armenian	4	75%	25%
Black	86	59%	41%
Burmese	3	100%	0%
Cambodian	7	71%	29%
Cape Verdean	6	67%	33%
Chin	1	0%	100%
Chinese	17	76%	24%
Congolese	4	75%	25%

Eritrean	2	0%	100%
Eskimo	1	0%	100%
Ethiopian	1	100%	0%
Filipino	12	42%	58%
French	3	100%	0%
Haitian	86	78%	22%
Hawaiian	1	0%	100%
Hindi	1	100%	0%
Hispanic	513	60%	40%
Indonesian	1	100%	0%
Japanese	1	100%	0%
Jewish	1	100%	0%
Korean	43	79%	21%
Lahu	1	0%	100%
Laotian	2	0%	100%
Liberian	2	0%	100%
Multicultural	135	37%	63%
Native American	42	21%	79%
Portuguese	3	67%	33%
Russian	1	0%	100%
Samoan	16	63%	38%
South Asian	2	100%	0%
Sudan	3	100%	0%

Tamil	3	100%	0%
Vietnamese	4	100%	0%
West Indian	8	38%	63%
White/English-speaking	3,607	84%	16%
Total	4,645	78%	22%

*APR USA/Canada Supplemental Question: Is your church multicultural?
(Definition: No one cultural group is more than 80% of a single worship service.)

Source:

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APPENDIX B: HOSPITALITY: A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO DISCIPLESHIP

Hospitality: A Holistic Approach to Discipleship



Becoming Churches that Cultivate
a Lifestyle of Holistic Hospitality in
Faithful Discipleship Living

DISCIPLESHIP MODEL BASED ON HOSPITALITY

Answering
the WHY?

John Wesley's View of the Church

John Wesley defined the church as “flesh and blood people, members of the body of Christ who as a peculiar people are holy precisely because their Savior is holy.”¹

Wesley believed the church to be a living organism that was animated by the Holy Spirit and primarily called to reflect holiness in the world. Because the task is massive and at odds with the culture that surrounds the church, Wesley believed that from time to time the public church is “called to reform in light of the task of raising up a holy people who are animated by the love of God and neighbor.”²



A LOOK INSIDE:

- Ecclesiology p. 2
- Discipleship p. 4
- No Quick Fixes p. 7

Every Christian church is unique in personality, history, and context but the call for every church is the very same: we are called to “go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19). The task is massive, and it often feels overwhelming and daunting for churches to know where to begin on the journey of intentional discipleship. Such a big task has left many churches floundering at the point of an intentional discipleship ministry that would underlie their beliefs and actions based on the Word of God. So often we forget our ecclesiology (who we are as the church), and having an intentional discipleship model helps us stay the course.

Without a correct ecclesiology being modeled and taught in local churches, we end up looking more like the culture of the world and less like the countercultural force Christ commissioned us to be. We end up with a faulty ecclesiology that more fully represents the self-centered systems of the world than the heart of God.

What is ecclesiology?

Ecclesiology comes from the Greek words: *ecclesia* (meaning church/assembly) and *ology* (study of) – so it is the study of the church.

A faithful study of ecclesiology helps us to understand the role of the church and our role in the church as followers of Christ.

The Bible (particularly in the New Testament) refers to the church quite often and mentions many roles of the church. Acts 2 gives the first and perhaps clearest description of church in the whole Bible. Here, we find that the roles of the church included: worship, teaching, fellowship, service, outreach, and prayer. The Bible also teaches about the priesthood of every believer. To pay attention to our ecclesiology means we seek to understand not just what the church should be doing corporately but also how individual believers are to live out their faith personally and in community. Any approach that seeks to strengthen faulty ecclesiology in the 21st century must focus on both aspects: corporate and personal.

One way we have tried to live out our ecclesiology in most churches is by way of a *discipleship ministry*. Yet, if you were to ask 15 Christians what the term discipleship means, you are sure to receive 15 different answers. We must help Christians understand what a lifestyle of discipleship looks like before we can expect them to live it out.

Questions for Discussion:

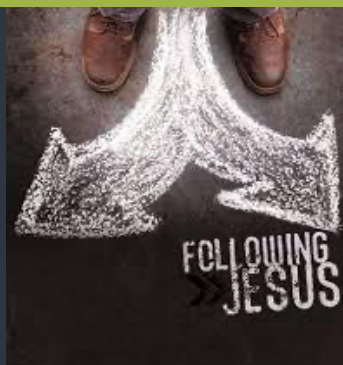
- What key Bible passages shape your understanding of the church?
- What is the role of the church in the world?
- What can living by a faulty ecclesiology produce in the church?
- John Wesley's ecclesiology was rooted in reflecting holiness in the world. How is that ecclesiology similar to or different from what is lived out by your local church?
- John Wesley called for the church to "re-form in light of the task of raising up a holy people." In what ways do you sense your church needs to re-form?

A Model for Faithful Discipleship Living

Most churches understand that “to make Christlike disciples” is our commission and task, but it often feels like such an overwhelming challenge that it is left undefined by church leadership and then feels out of grasp and confusing to believers.

The purpose of this workbook is to help churches begin to define and develop what the call to discipleship looks like in their particular context and to offer holistic hospitality as a faithful model for living out our call as disciples of Jesus.

Shallow Christianity is hurting churches and our call to a lifestyle of faithful discipleship has never been more needed than it is today.



DISCIPLESHIP DEFINED

“...years of discipleship programs and we are not disciplined.”

Discipleship is a key concept that is spoken about or desired in most churches. However, discipleship simply stated means different things to different people. For some it means being connected to a Sunday school class. For some it is the course offered to new believers. For some it is a small group concept. And for others it means a weekly gathering that takes place, usually at someone’s home.

But the sad truth is that, as Petersen stated in his book *Lifestyle Discipleship*,

“years of discipleship programs and we are not disciplined.”³

There is a serious disconnect between what we say we believe about Jesus and how we live our lives in most 21st century American churches.

N. T. Wright convincingly states it this way:

“plenty of people in the church and outside it have made up a ‘Jesus’ for themselves, and have found that this invented character makes few demands on them.”

He makes them feel happy from time to time but doesn’t challenge them, doesn’t suggest they get up and do something about the plight of the world. Which is of course, what the real Jesus had an uncomfortable habit of doing.”⁴

To follow the true Jesus is to enter into a **lifestyle of discipleship** where the disciple who is founded in Christ is being built up in Him and through Him for the sake of the world.



Discipleship is not simply about something we do or even about how we are engaging in learning God's Word; but rather disciples must be "head-learners," "heart-learners," and "life-learners."⁵

We must be transformed holistically in all areas of life for the sake of Christ.

Discipleship, then, is a **costly lifestyle** that a believer responds to that leads to *peculiarity, obedience, suffering, and holiness*.

Disciples of Christ are called to a peculiar lifestyle. This new, *peculiar* state of being changes the previous existence of the disciple. "The call to follow at once produces a new situation. To stay in the old situation makes discipleship impossible."⁶

So, almost immediately, the call of Jesus to follow Him becomes a call to lifelong *obedience*. "There is no road to faith or discipleship, no other road—only obedience to the call of Jesus."⁷

Disciples of Christ are peculiar people with a peculiar call to obedience.

Obedience presents believers with hard challenges. As we soon find out: "when Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die."⁸

Jesus's call to die to selfishness and sin cuts deep and brings about *suffering* to the young believer who perhaps, like the rich young ruler in the Gospels, wants to have the benefits of eternal life but not pay the price.

*"when Christ calls
a man, he bids
him come and
die."*

*- Dietrich
Bonhoeffer*

Discipleship Defined

Discipleship is a costly lifestyle that a believer responds to that leads to *peculiarity, obedience, suffering, and holiness*.

Luke 9:23-24

"Then he said to them all, 'whoever wants to be my disciples must deny themselves and take up my cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it.'

John 13:34-35

"A new commandment I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Colossians 1:28-29

"He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me."



This young man was after cheap grace: "grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate."⁹

Obedience to Christ is costly and it is sure to bring about suffering.

Christian discipleship requires rendering our ultimate allegiance to the suffering Christ, and it is "therefore not at all surprising that Christians should be called upon to suffer."¹⁰

But to follow Jesus through peculiarity, obedience, suffering and death will produce in us *holiness* that is birthed by living the resurrection life of Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.

"The real incentive towards genuine holiness, towards taking up our cross and following Jesus, comes not from fear of punishment but from a clear understanding of what it means to be human.

And we only get that clear understanding when we grasp the truth of the resurrection."¹¹

As Christ's disciples we are captivated by and empowered by the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead. To follow Jesus to the point of death also means that we experience the risen Savior within each of us and His Spirit giving us the vitality needed to truly live.

NO QUIX FIXES TO DISCIPLESHIP

For far too long the church has made discipleship a means to an end. We want bigger churches, healthier people, success as a religion, etc.; and so often we have employed discipleship programs with the hopes that our churches would explode in number as many discipleship programs promise.

It is human nature to want to fix things quickly and to get discouraged and settle for easy answers when the changes we want to see do not happen at a rapid pace. However, when it comes to our lives as disciples, we must surrender to a peculiar way of life that leads to obedience, suffering, and to holiness.

These things do not happen quickly, and we should not expect them to because the “path of discipleship is a life-long journey of growth and maturing.”¹² We should never expect to fully arrive on this side of heaven. Rather, we should expect to always be growing in our discipleship life with Christ.

Many seek out a discipleship ministry for the sake of fixing or growing the church. Though these might be outcomes of an intentional discipleship system, the primary purpose of discipleship is not to fix the church or bring about church growth. The purpose is to make Christlike disciples.

An intentional discipleship system brings clarity to a church’s ecclesiology and offers the principles via which a church will participate in discipleship. Such a system can inspire passion for making disciples among the leaders and laity of a local church.

When we participate in church life but refuse to be transformed, we simply become religious people. The world doesn’t need more religious people. God’s invitation to a lifestyle of discipleship isn’t a “mere matter of private piety, but...a call to people to stand up for the true God and his Servant Messiah, in the dangerous public arena of the real world.”¹³ God invites us to join God’s mission as committed disciples, becoming part of the solution to humanities brokenness rather than part of the problem.

Questions for Discussion:

- What key Bible passages shape your understanding of discipleship?
- How does your current discipleship model invite people to a lifestyle of peculiarity?
- How does your current discipleship model invite people to a lifestyle of obedience?
- How does your current discipleship model invite people to a lifestyle of suffering?
- How does your current discipleship model invite people to a lifestyle of holiness?
- Discuss opportunities for growth in your current model.

Answering
the
WHAT?

Hospitality as a Faithful Discipleship Model

Key Passages on Hospitality

Hebrews 13:2

"Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares."

Romans 15:7

"Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God."

Romans 12:13

"...extend hospitality to strangers."

Matthew 25:35

"For I was hungry and you gave. Me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in."

1 Peter 4:9

"Be hospitable to one another without complaining."



A Look Inside:

- Hospitality in Scripture p. 8
- God's Hospitable Nature p. 10
- The Cost of Hospitality p. 11

Hospitality is a Divine Characteristic that Bookends the Entire Bible

- In Genesis 1, God displays generous hospitality by way of a beautiful home, the Garden of Eden.
- In Genesis 3, humanity rejects God, and God extends hospitality by way of tailoring suitable clothes for them.
- In Genesis 12, God calls Abraham to emulate God's hospitality by becoming the vehicle through whom all the nations on the earth would be blessed.
- In Deuteronomy, God asks the people of God to show hospitality to the foreigners.
- In Leviticus, God's hospitality shines through as God's people were commanded to leave the edges of their harvest for the poor and the foreigners among them.
- In 1 and 2 Kings, we find hospitality to the foreigner through a different lens. This time it is the prophets of God: Elijah (1 Kings 17 & 18) and Elisha (2 Kings 4:9), who are the foreigners and outsiders and who are receiving unique hospitality.

God's greatest gift of hospitality comes through Christ, who leaves heaven and comes to earth offering hospitality to others and inviting them to join Him in His eternal home. The ministry of Jesus clearly shows us a tangible manifestation of divine hospitality that goes to the extreme of even washing feet.

But this was "not only a soteriological act, it also defines the mission of Jesus's disciples. The disciples' call is to participate in, to share in this love and mediate it to the world."¹⁴ That humble act—which included sacrifice, generosity, kindness, openness, and love—modeled for the disciples what Christian hospitality ought to look like. This is an act from God that is hard to understand and yet it is still the means through which the world will continue to see Jesus today.

God initiates hospitality again at Pentecost, whereby God's Holy Spirit now resides within the people of God.

In Revelation 21, a new city coming down from the clouds will be the final residing place for humanity. God is the greatest Host of all time and invites His children to emulate God's hospitality in the world.

Hospitality in the Early Church

Though Jesus lived and ministered in deeply hospitable ways towards His disciples and the hosts of people that He encountered, it was only after the powerful Pentecost event that we see the hospitality of Jesus reflected more clearly by His followers.

In Acts 2, we find a fascinating picture of the early believers who shared in fellowship, meals, and prayers to the point that they would sell possessions and distribute the proceeds to those who were in need.

In the early years of the church, there were several things that served to make hospitality central to their practice.

First, they shared meals among believers that often crossed significant cultural boundaries.

Second, the gospel initially spread as believers traveled from place to place sharing the good news and planting churches; these first missionaries depended upon the hospitality of others.

Third, the early church worshiped in house churches where hospitality was more natural and necessary.

And **fourth**, it was hospitality and the offering of care to strangers that

Questions for Discussion:

Does the theme of hospitality throughout the entire Bible surprise you? Why or why not?
Where have you personally experienced divine hospitality in your life?
How is divine hospitality modelled in the church today (worldwide, local, community, etc.)?
Would people who enter your church for the first time experience hospitality? If so, in what ways?
Which of the "costs" of hospitality (on page 11) is the hardest for you personally? Which do you believe is the hardest for the church corporately?

God's Hospitable Nature

God's very nature points to a Divine Community of hospitality. The Triune God exists as one in the communion of three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Even their very names imply that they exist in relationship. "The Father is identified as the Father only by virtue of his relationship to the Son, and vice versa.

The Spirit is Spirit by virtue of his interaction with the other two. To think of the trinitarian persons, then, is to think of relations."¹⁵ God does not exist outside of this love relationship with the Godhead.

The Gospel of John offers great trinitarian language that helps us understand God's hospitable nature.

The book begins by establishing the *equality* of the Father and the Son:

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1).

We learn that the Son *submits* to the will of the Father and becomes flesh and lives among humans (John 1:14). Jesus lives His life *deferring* to the Father as He seeks to make the Father known, not Himself (John 1:18).



We see the close *intimacy* between the Father and the Son over and over again. "The Father loves the Son and has placed all things in his hands" (John 3:35).

We also see that the relationship with the Holy Spirit is based on equality. Jesus states that He will ask the Father and "he will give you another Advocate" (John 14:16). Here, He does not mean a different kind of Advocate, but another of the same kind. Christ and the Spirit are of the same essence.

We also find that the Spirit *submits* to and *defers* to the Father and the Son because of the *intimacy* of love they share.

We can take John 16:13-15 as an example, "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears.... He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine."

There is an inseparable bond of mutuality and hospitality that is core to the Triune God. "The perichoresis of the Trinity is more than just a simple dance (as it is too often defined) but is instead the "deepest form of presence and sharing."¹⁶

This is the type of mutuality that the world needs to see reflected in the church today, and it is best reflected by way of Christian hospitality.

In John 17 we find a powerful prayer of Jesus for His present and future disciples.

"I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17:20-21).

It is clear, that Jesus desires for the church to embody the love between the Trinity. ***To make this a reality in the church today, it will require a culture of hospitality to be established so that we treat others as equals, submit to one another, enjoy intimacy of relationship, and defer to each other.*** The hospitality of love and mutuality that defines the Persons of the Trinity should guide our extension of God's hospitality in all of our relationships.

Any talk of Christian hospitality must be deeply grounded in the doctrine of the Trinity.

It is there that we find both our identity and our vocation as the church. The Triune God is hospitable and loving by nature, and that is the essence of what the church is called to be as well.



Hospitality: THE cost

To live out biblical hospitality is costly. First of all, it requires the *sacrifice* of the very culture that has formed us as individuals. "When it comes to pursuing biblical hospitality as a way of life, we immediately happen upon a major obstacle; almost everything in our culture is set up to hinder us from pursuing it."¹⁷

In order to pursue biblical hospitality, we must *generously sacrifice* our time, emotional space, energy, and our resources to build relationships with others.

In the popular parable of the Good Samaritan that Jesus teaches, found in Luke 10, the hero that Jesus portrays is the man who showed *kindness* and mercy to a

stranger on the road. A truly hospitable person will emulate the mercy and *kindness* found in the heart of God who offers to humanity mercy and compassion time and again.

Hospitality also requires *openness* to others. It is not about grand gestures but about open hearts. "When I let a stranger into my heart, I let a new possibility approach me. When I reach past my own ideas, I begin to stretch myself open to the world, and this opening of my heart could change everything."¹⁸

It is the opening of our hearts that leads to transformational hospitality because *openness* in hospitality leads to *love*.

In Scripture, one of the key words for hospitality is the Greek word *philoxenia*, which combines the general word for love or

affection for people who are connected by kinship or faith (*phileo*), and the word for stranger (*xenos*). "Etymologically and practically, in the New Testament, hospitality is closely connected to love."¹⁹

Hospitality, then, is of utmost importance in the life of a believer, for the very gospel we proclaim is one of love.

In his book, *The Wounded Healer*, Henri Nouwen discusses the hospitality required of a minister, and offers this description, "...we can only love because we are born out of love, we can only give because our life is a gift, and we can only make others free because we are set free by Him whose heart is greater than ours."²⁰

This portrays that hospitality must become more than something we do as followers of Christ; it must take hold of our deepest affections, thoughts, and actions and define who we are.

Biblical hospitality, then, is the gift offered to believers through Christ that allows them to receive guests and strangers with *kind* and *open* hearts, thus allowing them to offer *sacrificial generosity* of their time, talent, and treasure through the spirit of *love*.

If these elements are lived out by individual Christians in their daily lives, it will pave the way for a culture of hospitality to define local congregations and allow for spaces that embody the kingdom of God where others are treated as equals, mutual submission is modeled, where intimacy of relationship is enjoyed, and where deferring to one another is practiced.


This is an important and appropriate aim of any discipleship ministry within a local body—to produce followers of Christ who emulate the hospitality of the Triune God.

HOLISTIC HOSPITALITY

Answering
the HOW?

**Ways we Offer
Hospitality to
God
Personally**

- Prayer
- Solitude
- Teachability
- Journaling
- Spiritual Direction
- Submission
- Waiting
- Unplugging
- Rule of Life
- Bible Study
- Attitude of
Gratitude
- Memorization



A Look Inside:

- Hospitality to God p. 12
- Hospitality to Self p. 14
- Hospitality to Others p. 15
- Sociological Needs p. 16
- Psychological Needs p. 19
- Spiritual Needs p. 22

Compartmentalizing our lives gets us into trouble. It is what allows one person to act one way in one setting and a completely different way in another. This compartmentalization happens in the area of faith and beliefs far too often and gives the Christian church a bad witness in the world. If disciples of Christ who are hospitable to God, self, and others, were being formed in our local churches and they then enter the inhospitable spaces of their daily lives with the love of God burning in their hearts, the church could really affect the climate of society today! A holistic approach to hospitality is the answer.

Hospitality to God

It is God's extravagant hospitality that extends to humanity the offer of salvation and right relationship with God. Receiving God's hospitality and then offering hospitality back to God begins the work of transformation in the believer, which is a necessary discipleship step in the development of Christian character. God's perfect love refuses to leave us in our places of brokenness and sin. "We are to die to the sinful parts of who we are—such as defensiveness, detachment from others, arrogance, stubbornness, hypocrisy, judgmentalism, a lack of vulnerability—as well as more obvious sins."²¹ Willingness to be transformed by God's Spirit is an important step of hospitality we offer to God.

As a group, discuss other means by which you have offered or would like to offer hospitality to God.



Ways we Offer Hospitality to God Corporately:

- Worship
- Prayer
- Waiting on God's Response
- Discernment Process
- Holy Communion
- Stewardship
- Retreats
- Witness
- Care of the Earth
- Humility
- Teachability

Hospitality to God (cont.)

Once God's hospitality is received by a person—and we, in turn, offer hospitality to God and allow God entrance into the deeper places of our being—God begins the transformation process. The Holy Spirit moves into the life of the believer as not just Host but a welcomed Guest. And this Guest wishes to overtake every room in our house with His power and grace.

Offering daily hospitality to the welcomed Guest that now abides in us is of utmost importance for anyone who calls themselves a follower of Jesus. Hospitality to God includes spending time in spiritual practices in order to learn to listen and wait for God in our everyday lives. God is a hospitable God and will infuse us with His likeness as we spend time in God's presence. Apart from making hospitality to God a priority in our lives, we will not be transformed into hospitable people. Any church that is serious about correcting faulty ecclesiology must teach and model hospitality to God as primary.

As a group, discuss other means by which you have offered or would like to offer corporate hospitality to God.

Hospitality to Self

God's hospitality is so extravagant that it invites those who host God to extend hospitality to themselves. That almost sounds like a contradiction in terms because we are used to thinking of hospitality as something we do for others. But God is an incredibly generous Host who allows us to welcome even ourselves on the path of hospitality. "In other words, God's grace calls us to a ministry of hospitality, to welcoming the stranger in others, as well as in ourselves, into our midst."²² In this journey of receiving God's hospitality, we will learn that part of the gift of transformation occurs as we learn to love ourselves. "Few Christians make the connection between love of self and love of others. Sadly, many believe that taking care of themselves is a sin, a 'psychologizing' of the gospel taken from our self-centered culture."²³ However, in order to love others profoundly, we must first have applied God's gracious gift of love to ourselves; we must love ourselves as God loves us. Can we affirm other people's unique identities when we don't affirm our own? Can we really love our neighbors well without loving ourselves?" The obvious answer here is "no."

We are called in to a lifestyle that models God's love and hospitality. However, if we are to lay ourselves down for the sake of others, we must first have a "self" to lay down. "Jesus was not selfless. He did not live as if only other people counted. He knew his value and worth. He had friends. He asked people to help him. At the same time Jesus was not selfish. He did not live as if nobody else counted."²⁴

God's hospitality is so generous that it calls us to take care of ourselves too; "...self-care is never a selfish act—it is simply good stewardship of the only gift I have, the gift I was put on earth to offer others. Anytime we can listen to true self and give it the care it requires, we do it not only for ourselves, but for the many others whose lives we touch."²⁵ The hospitality of God calls us to a lifestyle of holistic spirituality that includes our spirit, mind, and body.

The church has done a good job of focusing on spiritual transformation, a fair job of talking about the transformation of the mind, but very little focus goes to the transformation of the body in faith formation. But "when we care for our bodies, we acknowledge the holiness of all of life and honor the fact that God is within us."²⁶ We are holistic beings called to a lifestyle of holistic hospitality.

Hospitality to self needs to be taught as an important piece of a discipleship model that desires to holistically affect the church and the individual. Unless we have offered hospitality to ourselves, we will not be able to truly extend genuine hospitality to others. We can only give that which we have deeply experienced. God offers us divine hospitality; and, as we receive it and become transformed by it, we will learn to see ourselves as part of God's valuable creation and treat ourselves (mind, spirit, body) with compassion as well. Then we are more fully prepared to engage in hospitality to others.

Questions for Discussion:

- What are some ways that we are called to offer hospitality to ourselves as believers (e.g., Sabbath, unplugging, self-care, slowing down, pilgrimage, contemplation, exercise, etc.)?
- By and large as a church, do we make people guilty for self-care or do we teach stewardship in all areas including health of mind and body?
- What might be the benefit of people understanding that hospitality to self is important to God?



Hospitality to Others

In the Christian walk, the same grace that has been extended to us in God's hospitality becomes the core of not just our identity but of our vocation as disciples of Jesus. As we live out the call to emulate divine hospitality, we will find that some encounters and practices come easy and are rewarding—like when we offer hospitality to a person who is “deserving” and gracious or when we contribute to a cause that is close to our heart. We will, however, also be surprised to find that often the “other” can make us feel uncomfortable. Opportunities for hospitality are all around us, and at times we will encounter internal resistance to the call of hospitality. Sometimes people who are different from us evoke anger or fear within us and therefore we struggle to extend hospitality to them or do so begrudgingly and at a distance. Interestingly, even these uncomfortable situations provide opportunities for growth. “By thoughtfully exploring the various possible reasons that underlie our personal discomfort, we may come face-to-face with some aspect of our own unresolved doubts from the past, our brokenness, sinfulness, and/or hardness of heart.”²⁷ It is the constant offering of hospitality to God that will allow us to remain open to extend hospitality to others; and in that process of surrender, we are offered many opportunities for personal growth and transformation.

As a group, discuss the ways that we are called to extend hospitality to others inside and outside the church. Consider the following examples:

- Discipling
- Mentoring
- Listening
- Spiritual Friendship
- Outreach

- Unity
- Small Groups
- Justice
- Forgiveness
- Reconciliation

- Control of the Tongue
- Humility
- Shared Meals
- Fellowship

Hospitality Meets Needs

In order to emulate divine hospitality, the church must be willing to meet the needs of people. When the sociological, psychological, and spiritual needs of individuals are met, their understanding of God's hospitality can grow, as well as their capacity to extend to others what they have received from God and God's church.

It is in the giving and receiving of hospitality that mindsets are transformed and people are free to give what they have so graciously received. The disconnect we see between the theology of hospitality and the application of it in local churches can be profoundly addressed in our discipleship, Sunday school, or small group ministries.

Ministries that intentionally meet the sociological, psychological, and spiritual needs of people are more instrumental in shaping followers of Christ who embody divine hospitality.

Just like our personal understanding of hospitality must be transformed to a holistic understanding in order for it to take root, similarly, transforming the culture of a church to one that is hospitable will require an intentional structure that embodies hospitality in the following areas of human need: sociological, psychological, and spiritual.

SOCIOLOGICAL NEEDS

Humanity was born with certain innate needs: shelter, food, water, guardians, etc. These are the basic needs of any human being; but there are other needs that are just as profound: the need for safety, belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. To be human is to have these needs, and when they are not fulfilled, people have little capacity to thrive in life. By nature of her vocation and ministry, the church has a wonderful opportunity to meet three deep sociological needs of people: community, belonging, and safety. When these needs are met in individuals within the local church, they are then more able to respond with openness to God's Spirit and to others—to become a people shaped by divine hospitality.

The Need for Community

In our highly individualistic culture, admitting that we have a deep insatiable need for community almost feels offensive or counterintuitive. However, individualism does not bring about the deep sense of satisfaction it promises; we need community. "It's in our DNA. We need one another, plain and simple."²⁸ The need for connection with a group of individuals beyond the self is a very real need that should be met in order for humans to thrive. Dean Ornish, M.D., provides scientific proof that this is true. He states: "We are creatures of community. Those individuals, societies, and cultures who learned to take care of each other, to love each other, and to nurture relationships with each other during the past several hundred thousand years were more likely to survive than those who did not."²⁹ Community and a sense of connection is, thus, imperative to our survival as a people.

Throughout the years, the church has offered beautiful pictures of this holy community to the world; a clear picture found in Acts 2 portrays the growth and impact of the early church. People saw the way they interacted with one another and were drawn to this lifegiving community. However, it was not just about their good actions. Act 2 begins with: "When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place" (Acts 2:1, NIV). Aside from the active work of the Holy Spirit, this kind of connectedness and living of life together is not possible; it becomes easily distorted and even dangerous.

A discipleship ministry that is grounded on the hospitality of God is primarily focused on offering hospitality to God's Spirit. This entails waiting and listening to what God is saying to each particular church, and then following God into the picture of healthy community that each local church needs to represent, rather than chasing trends or programs.

Before moving forward, consider pausing for several minutes to pray and ask God for clear direction in how to foster a sense of community in your local church.

SOCIOLOGICAL NEEDS (cont.)

The Need to Belong

As relational creatures who are born helpless and require others to nurture and teach us, we will look to the community that shapes us to answer the profound “Who Am I?” and “Do I Belong?” questions of the soul. A desire to belong begins in childhood as we try to make sense of the ways we connect to and are perceived by others. The need to belong is so deep and innate that, “we often try to acquire it by fitting in and by seeking approval.”³⁰ When people do not experience healthy feelings of belonging within a community, “they will often find it in ways that are dark and destructive.”³¹ A sense of true belonging can shape our identity and allow individuals to contribute in healing ways into the life of the community; but a lack of belonging can also lead to acting out in violence, or “can be distorted in ways that may lead to disease, despair, and darkness.”³² A lack of belonging leads to isolation and loneliness.

In a study on loneliness, researchers found that living with loneliness, “increases our odds of dying early by 45%.”³³ Likewise, other research shows that “anything that promotes a sense of isolation often leads to illness and suffering. Anything that promotes a sense of love and intimacy, connection and community, is healing.”³⁴ These studies both show a similar finding: people who do not feel like they belong in community will not thrive as much as those who do. The need for belonging and community cannot be denied. A sense of true belonging fosters health, happiness, and even enables people to endure a profound amount of pain and suffering—and survive. A sense of “knowing that I belong” is the most common desire but also one of the least realized for those who wish to build community.³⁴

The human need for belonging with others is very profound. However, we also have an intense need to belong to God. “Feeling one’s belongingness to God is a real and urgent need.”³⁵ Yet, even the longing for God is evidence of the hospitality of the Holy Spirit in a human being before they even step foot in a church. The role of the church then, is to foster what the Holy Spirit is already doing. To model divine hospitality is to disregard a one-size-fits-all approach to community life. We can best work alongside God’s Spirit by offering several opportunities for belonging. God’s Spirit can create a sense of belonging through various ministries. When we participate in a culture of hospitality, we will provide diverse options in which people can find belonging with God and others. Ministries founded upon the hospitality of God understand that it is God’s Spirit who ultimately satisfies the need for belonging; the various methods or ministries become an instrument God can use.

In groups of 2-3, discuss how you believe your church is doing in working alongside God’s Spirit to assure people that they belong in your faith community.

Consider giving each group an area of the church to discuss (e.g., children, teens, people with addiction, senior adults, those on the fringes, the poor, minority groups, people with disabilities, etc.).

SOCIOLOGICAL NEEDS (cont.)

The Need to Feel Safe

Another need that humanity has is the need for safety. This need can also be filled in healthy or destructive ways and is born out of the fear of danger. The need for safety often leads people to choose like-minded individuals to befriend and with whom to belong. This also means that the temptation is to push people away who are different. However, seeking safety in this way has not “delivered that deep sense of belonging that we are hardwired to crave.”³⁶ Sorting ourselves out by politics, beliefs, race, or anything else has not led to people feeling safe. “At the same time sorting is on the rise so is loneliness.”³⁷ Again, we arrive at the same conclusion; a lack of community, belonging, and safety leads to a deep sense of loneliness that can be toxic to the individual’s body, soul, and spirit and to societies as a whole. This leaves the church of the 21st century with wonderful opportunities to provide a place where flourishing community can exist.

In a fear-stricken world, many people seek out the local church in an effort to feel safe. The hospitable church can utilize teams, fellowship events, small groups, classes, etc. as places where a deep sense of safety can develop. One way that sociologists suggest people feel safer in a large world is by forming smaller tribes or units. This can be done for positive reasons such as love or because of hate and suspicion of others. Small groups, bands, or teams within local churches can have the same effect; they can become places of safety and harness love and unity, or they can become divisive and destructive forces. However, a discipleship model committed to postures of hospitality provides safe space where people can open up to the “possibility of change and a deeper relational encounter with the other.”³⁸ Unless people feel safe, they will not connect deeply.

Recovery support groups lead the way in fostering a sense of safety in small group gatherings. They have a list of rules that is read prior to every meeting that helps foster safety in groups. These include the expectation of confidentiality, a time limit in sharing, no crosstalk, no attempt to fix one another, etc. These rules help set up healthy expectations for participants and communicate that it is a safe place to share because there will be no judgment. A discipleship model that longs to extend divine hospitality would do well to set up rules for their small groups that foster a spirit of safety.

Ideas for Discussion

- Are there any groups within your local church that seem to be divisive or destructive? If so, what steps could be taken to correct that?
- Have someone in your group pretend to be “a first-attender.” Ask them to imagine the fear they might experience in the foyer of your church, in the sanctuary, if they made their way to a small group/class? Would they feel safe to return? Why or why not?
- Discuss one or two key steps that could be put into place immediately that help foster safety.

PSYCHOLOGICAL NEEDS

The church is to be a primary vehicle for people's overall growth and maturity. "Humans move from basic physiological needs to psychological and moral ones..." to "spiritual needs";³⁹ and the hospitable Spirit of God has already provided the gifts and graces within the body of Christ for those needs to be met. For far too long we have focused solely on the spiritual needs of people and left emotional needs to the psychologists. However, both the spiritual and emotional needs of people are to be tended to by the people of God and are "inseparably linked and critical to a full biblical discipleship."⁴⁰ The discipleship ministry of a church based on hospitality can meet some deep psychological needs of individuals, such as the need to be loved, the need to be heard, and the need for self-esteem; and it can, thus, contribute towards the embodiment of divine hospitality in the local church.

The Need for Love

In an article titled "Freudian Slips: Live Loved," McConnell tackles the intersection between psychology and theology and asserts that "love lies at the heart of our humanity and of God's divinity."⁴¹ The need to be loved is intense and of utmost importance for the human; we long to be connected to an "other," and this need is "universal and is as legitimate as physical hunger and as vital for our psychological well-being as food is for our physical well-being."⁴² However, though we were made for connection by a loving God, "we are not born into connection because we live in a fallen world, it has to be gained, and it is an arduous, developmental process."⁴³ The need for love is innate, intense, and must be tended to in order for humans to grow as they were created to.

A process of healthy attachment and bonding is necessary for humans to thrive in life. "Without going through that process of bonding, we are doomed to alienation and isolation. Not only do we not grow, we deteriorate."⁴⁴ The need to be loved is a God-given need, and our desire to be attached in relationships is normal; it "remains with us throughout our lives, and is not some childhood dependency that we outgrow."⁴⁵ Ministry rooted in the hospitality of God can be a safe place of attachment for people, where dissociation and lack of bonding can be healed. "People who can't make emotional attachments live in a state of perpetual hunger."⁴⁶ The hospitality God offers feeds the souls of people through the love found in the body of Christ.

Discuss ways you have sensed God calling your church to come alongside and love different groups of people (children, teens, adults, senior adults, low-income families, neighbors, etc.)

Discuss steps you can take to move more and more in this direction.

PSYCHOLOGICAL NEEDS (cont.)

The Need to be Heard

When we feel loved and rightly attached to someone, “it provides a secure base from which to explore the world.”⁴⁷ Exploration of the world involves learning to communicate; to listen and to be listened to; to be heard. As children, when we fall and hurt ourselves, it is the retelling of our story of how we got hurt and a word of compassion or empathy from someone that typically does the best job in soothing the pain. In a book titled *Listening to Killers*, Garberino, a psychological expert witness in murder cases, speaks to the intense need that humans have of being heard. His job is to “listen to killers.”⁴⁸ He asserts that listening is his line of duty: “it’s hard to do...but we have to do it if we are going to progress in understanding and preventing killing in America.”⁴⁹ When people are not heard, when their voices are scuffed out due to lack of health in their family of origin, oppression, violence, or abuse of some kind, dissociation is possible. Dissociation is dangerous and leads to crimes of all kinds; listening breaks the cycle of dissociation. The need to be heard within the confines of a safe relationship is an intense need that humanity has and, when tended to well, can also lead to healing and wholeness in individuals.

A ministry of loving hospitality is an incarnational ministry where Jesus becomes real to people through the “skin” of the church. “People today are desperate for ‘skin’ —to be loved, for someone to Incarnate with them.”⁵⁰ The desperation of people is seen in their willingness to pay over \$100 an hour for a psychologist to enter their world and listen to them. “Today, God still has physical skin and can be seen, touched, heard, and tasted...through his body, the church, in whom he dwells.”⁵¹ To reflect God in ministry is to be a people who listen well to the stories, the joys, and the needs of other people. The Gospels are filled with accounts of Jesus’s interactions with individuals; we find that He listened. “He was present, never in a rush or distracted. He took the time to explore stories.”⁵² Hospitality-based ministry enjoys more than good conversation or fellowship; it participates in attentive and reflective listening. “Basic conversational skills are an important dimension of Christian charity: possibly the most important way of attending to guests.”⁵³ If we are to become hospitable people, our ministry settings must foster environments where people intentionally listen to one another.

Discuss the areas of church life that naturally lend themselves towards listening to people’s stories.

Discuss how you can incorporate the discipline of listening into worship services, small group gatherings, fellowship events, outreach events, etc.

PSYCHOLOGICAL NEEDS (cont.)

The Need for Self-Esteem

Along with the need to be loved and to be heard, having a healthy self-esteem is also important to human flourishing. The components needed for a healthy sense of self include a sense of belongingness, a sense of worth and value, and a sense of being competent.⁵⁴ As we have previously seen, humanity has an innate need to connect deeply; a feeling of dissociation or lack of bonding can lead people, “to believe they are not worthy of love and are not able to trust others, often resulting in low self-esteem.”⁵⁵ Self-esteem does not just affect one’s feelings but also their behaviors. The enemy of the human soul knows self-esteem is a great need and uses it against us. “Satan’s greatest psychological weapon is a gut-level feeling of inferiority, inadequacy, and low self-worth.”⁵⁶ With an unhealthy view of self, humanity will quickly deteriorate and become far less than it was created to be by a loving God who calls us each “beloved.”

Feelings of low self-worth and esteem shackle many Christians even when they have great faith, knowledge in God’s Word, and wonderful spiritual experiences. Poor self-image keeps people “tied up in knots, bound by terrible feelings of inferiority, and chained to a deep sense of worthlessness.”⁵⁷ A discipleship ministry centered upon the hospitality of God can extend grace and help meet this important need in people. First, the best thing for people struggling with self-esteem is to *avoid being alone*. Left to their own thoughts and feelings, depression and alienation are sure to reign. Small groups or ministry teams based upon God’s hospitality will provide safe spaces for people to have the ability to connect with others and not journey alone. Second, *seeking help from others* is important if people are to arrive at a healthy view of themselves. Again, hospitable groups can allow for openness and transparency that makes it easier for people to reach out for help. Third, *leaning heavily on God’s Word* is a powerful means by which one can center their self-worth. A hospitable discipleship ministry will offer various options for people to connect to God’s Word alongside other believers. And finally, self-esteem can ultimately be healed as a *person learns to rest in the presence of God’s Spirit within them*.⁵⁸ Churches that are focused on extending hospitality will consistently welcome people with low self-esteem into their midst as if they were Christ Himself, thus treating people as the image-bearers that they are, even before they see that in themselves. By being hospitable churches, we teach people to lift their “head high as a son or daughter of God.”⁵⁹ What a privilege we have to partner with God in the reprogramming and renewal process of people’s minds and self-esteem.

What do you think about the assertion made here that God wants to use the church to fill some deep psychological needs in people?

Why do you think the church has left “most” psychological issues to psychologists when clearly the church is capable of helping with many of these?

How do we encourage or discourage healthy self-esteem among our members?

SPIRITUAL NEEDS

The deepest spiritual desire of the human heart is to experience union with the Triune God; however, “apart from human community,” that need will not be satisfied.⁶⁰ The church, then, becomes a necessary means that God uses in salvation and to fill the spiritual needs and longings of the human heart.

The Need for Spiritual Friendships

In our cry for union with God, the human heart will also long “to participate in spiritual community, to engage in spiritual conversations” and to co-journey with others.⁶¹ This yearning is for a safe place where friendships with other people who are hungry for God can grow. The innate need to experience the supernatural leads people to desire belonging within a community where they know “what it means to sense the Spirit moving.”⁶² Humans who are aware of their spiritual needs long for more than relationships that are simply focused on improving each other’s lives, but for spiritual friends with whom to grow and live life. People want to “know and be known in conversations”⁶³ that are not just focused on personal issues but on Christ Himself. Spiritual friendships fill this great need because they provide a “wonderful kind of togetherness where each of the friends encourages and liberates each other into the fullness of their own potential.”⁶⁴ We are not meant to journey through life alone. A desire for friends in the Lord is a spiritual longing that God has equipped the church to fulfill.

In John 15:12-13, Jesus commands His followers to emulate His example and to “love one another” to the point of laying down their life for their friends. Jesus was a master teacher, healer, preacher, and friend. Like all humans, Jesus needed friends in life; the Bible shows that He welcomed people in a variety of spaces. In *public spaces*, He invited large crowds of people to sit with Him as He shared a meal with them. We find Him in *social spaces*, like at the wedding in Cana at Galilee, interacting with friends and family. In *private spaces*, we see Him travelling with His twelve disciples. And in *intimate spaces*, we find Him bearing His soul at Gethsemane to His closest friends: Peter, James, and John. Jesus models the need for friends in all spaces: public, social, private, and intimate.⁶⁵

Small groups grounded upon God’s hospitality should emulate Jesus when it comes to spiritual friendships. Providing opportunities for people to connect in *public* and *social* spaces within a small group might include facilitating events such as concerts or sporting events, having meals together, or serving side by side in the community. A philosophy of ministry founded on God’s hospitality, however, takes it further and also provides space for people to grow in *private* and *intimate* friendships and depends on the Holy Spirit to empower community. This requires risky hospitality in the sharing of one’s very soul with another; but if we are to follow the path of the Spirit, then we must be willing to turn our chairs and face a “small community of friends.” It is in the act of facing one another that we “find the power of God’s Spirit” to make community happen.⁶⁶

The need for spiritual friendship is deep and wide. Jesus modeled it best by having friends in all spaces; and yet His need for friendship with a close few cannot be denied. We also need intimate connection with a few (two or three) close friends with whom we can be our truest self and to whom we can bare our soul in our own gardens of Gethsemane. Small groups based upon the hospitality of God recognize this intense longing in the human spirit and prayerfully facilitate environments where friendships (in all spaces) can naturally develop. The Spirit of God is the only One who can make supernatural connections happen among humans; but in hospitality-centered congregations, we also strive to create an environment that is both hospitable to God’s Spirit and to others.

SPIRITUAL NEEDS (cont.)

The Need for Spiritual Direction

In the human search for God and authentic relationship with other believers, what the soul needs is a “spiritual caregiver” who can address the “God longing” inside of us.⁶⁷ We need someone to listen with us to what God may be saying in the midst of our personal life experiences. This need can be satisfied by the ministry of spiritual direction. The spiritual director is a host who bestows “guest-friendship.” This ministry is one of hospitality; as the spiritual director in the “truest and deepest sense” becomes a reflection of the “abundant hospitality shown by the Host at the heavenly banquets.”⁶⁸ The spiritual director comes “alongside another who seeks God’s direction for living”;⁶⁹ and provides a “hospitable space of time for the other to reflect upon the spiritual quest.”⁷⁰ To listen to another’s soul in their disclosure and discovery may be the greatest service that any “human being ever performs for another.”⁷¹ When all the layers have been stripped away, God is what people want and need the most. However, walking the spiritual journey with someone who listens well to the leading of God also fills a deep spiritual need in the hearts of people.

Since its inception, the Wesleyan movement could be identified by its disciplined care of souls. John Wesley himself matured under the spiritual direction of his own mother, Susanna. Wesley created societies, classes, and bands so that every member could sit under communal spiritual direction. The need to have different groups and different rules for each group emerged from the understanding that the intensity of people’s spiritual needs varies from person to person. “In the Wesleyan movement, persons could move from one group into a more stringent one—from classes, to bands, to select societies.”⁷² Wesley was amazed by what he saw happening through the spiritual direction operating in these groups. He understood that being a Christian required spiritual companionship on the journey and offered inclusive hospitality by forming a variety of groups for people to choose from which all included spiritual direction and soul care of some sort.

Spiritual directors aspire to reflect Christ’s love. Therefore, they take on the risk of hospitality as they look at others with the “conviction that God has placed something terrific in each member.”⁷³ Spiritual directors who are hospitable to God’s Spirit and to others “can see it, call it forth, and enjoy it.”⁷⁴ When this happens, a transformational miracle is taking place through spiritual community.

The ministry of spiritual direction can take place one-on-one or within a small group of people. However, it hardly ever happens within the life of the church outside of people connecting with each other through small group ministry where they can grow in friendship and trust. When we invite God’s hospitable Spirit to lead people to connect with others and spiritual direction takes place, people can be touched in deep and life-changing ways.

Questions for Discussion

- Are people in your church finding spiritual friendships? If so, how do you see this happening? If not, why do you think this is so?
- How might we prayerfully facilitate ministry so that spiritual friendships can naturally form?
- If, spiritual directors are people who are living surrendered to Christ and growing in faith and Christian maturity and who are willing to mentor/guide other believers by way of an intentional relationship, how do you identify them in the church, train them, and invite them to such a role?
- How do you help connect those seeking spiritual direction with willing spiritual directors?

RULE OF LIFE

Answering the WHEN/WHERE?

A good rule can set us free to be our true and best selves. It is a working document, a kind of spiritual budget, not carved in stone but subject to regular review and revision. It should support us, but never constrict us."

- Margaret Guenther

A RULE OF LIFE:

- ☐ Helps give our abiding with Jesus proper support
- ☐ Is a tool that helps us align our schedules with our values
- ☐ Is not legalistic or rigid; it's a lifegiving structure
- ☐ Helps us to become more fruitful



A Look Inside:

- Rule of Life p. 24
- St. Benedict's Rule p. 25
- Create Your Own. p. 26

To establish a Rule of Life requires commitment to a set of practices or rhythms that one intentionally longs to live by. By creating space in our busy lives to be with Jesus, become like Jesus, and do what Jesus did, we are able to live the spiritual life to the "full" as promised in John 10:10. A rule of life helps us to align our schedule with our values. It is meant to be a lifegiving structure that allows for growth and spiritual joy.

The word "rule" comes from a Latin word that originally described a trellis in a vineyard. A trellis was important and needed because it would lift the vine off from the ground and give it the support it needed to be able to bear the maximum amount of fruit. In the same way, a Rule of Life offers a structured support to help us "abide in the vine" that is Christ and bear much fruit in Him (John 15:1-8).

An ancient Rule that has stood the test of time was written by St. Benedict. He wrote this Rule out of love, and it was not ever meant to be "some harsh, unyielding dictum but an invitation to follow a prescribed path, to use a type of framework, a trellis structure through which you can grow to personal fulfillment and a meaningful life."⁷⁵

St Benedict's Rule of Hospitality

St. Benedict's *Rule*, which has been alive and dynamic for fifteen centuries and counting, offers many vibrant components of hospitality that help correct a faulty ecclesiology; it challenges our theology on how we view and receive others; it invites us to use prayer as a means for greater hospitality; it promotes humility and kindness; it deals with how we treat the poor and the strangers in our communities; and it reminds us that because hospitality is so essential to the Christ-follower, it must become an intentional discipline.

Still today, St. Benedict invites believers to encounter the divine presence that lives in other people through the practice of hospitality; for hospitality shown toward another person is hospitality toward the Trinity. Like Abraham, we too are being invited on a pilgrim's journey to be a blessing to all of the nations of the world through biblical hospitality.



The **first section** of St. Benedict's *Rule* on hospitality establishes a theological basis; it states: "All guests who present themselves are to be welcomed as Christ."⁷⁶ Benedictine hospitality requires the acknowledgment that all people were created in the image of God and carry within them the presence of Christ. According to Benedict, guests are honored not because of external signs of devotion or righteousness, but on the faith that when we serve even the least of these, we are serving Christ Himself.

Section two of St. Benedict's *Rule* on hospitality is focused on the arrival of the guest who is welcomed in with prayer. Praying for one's own peace in the encounter is just as important as praying for the peace of the newfound friend. Through distressing encounters, we can come face-to-face with our own doubts, brokenness, sinful attitudes, our calloused or hardened hearts, pride, insecurities, racism, and fears. To encounter peace in those hidden areas of our lives is something only God can bring about through the Holy Spirit and through our openness to let another in.

Section three of St. Benedict's *Rule* speaks of the humility and kindness with which a follower of Christ must serve the guest or stranger. "Every kindness is shown to him" and also, "all humility must be shown...by a bow of the head."⁷⁷ Humility is what allows us to set aside our own agendas to better serve the needs of those around us. St. Benedict believed that through humility and kindness, followers of Jesus could participate in the healing work of Christ in the world.

In **section four** of St. Benedict's *Rule* on hospitality, "Christ is still more received in the poor and in strangers."⁷⁸ As we provide spiritual and physical hospitality to the stranger, the sick, the homeless, the poor, the rich, and everyone in between, we become transformed by the act of stepping out of our own comfort zones and being faithful to God's heartbeat of loving all His children.

Section five of St. Benedict's *Rule* on hospitality gives detailed instructions on how the work of hospitality is to be divided so that it does not become burdensome and so "they can perform this service without grumbling."⁷⁹ If we are to take hospitality seriously in our lives and in our churches, then it must be an intentionally planned and included part of our lives. It is worth the risk, because after all: "Making room for the stranger who could be God changes everything."⁸⁰ We find profound wealth of wisdom in St. Benedict's *Rule* on hospitality; we too can create a *Rule* by which we intentionally live out a lifestyle of hospitable discipleship. This can be a powerful tool used to shape our churches as kingdom people.

Prayerfully Create Your Own Rule to Live By as a Church

Without intentionality, good ideas simply stay good ideas and never get implemented or lived out. With your board or discipleship team, begin to think about values that you want to intentionally live by in order to begin to model holistic hospitality as faithful disciples of Christ. Your *Rule* should reflect your context and engage your unique challenges.

Consider these questions as you brainstorm:

Do we welcome ALL as if they were Christ? Have our greeter and usher teams been trained on how we want people to be welcomed, or is it just assumed they already know? How often do we train and retrain for consistency?

Are there any labels we use in speaking about others that need to be evaluated?

How do we faithfully include the retelling of the Story of God's hospitality in our gatherings?

How do our corporate prayers exhibit hospitality to God's Spirit? Do we ask God to simply bless our ideas and programs, or is there a genuine search for God's guiding Presence in every gathering?

How well do we listen to people's stories? Are our weekly small groups/classes conducive for people to connect in this way?

Are our small group leaders trained and periodically retrained in holistic hospitality?

How do we encourage people (especially our leaders) to practice Sabbath rest and self-care?

Are all of our groups hospitable? If not, which ones are not, and what do you believe to be the source of the problem? How can we begin to address it?

Do we shy away from hard conversations, or do we engage them for the sake of maturity, reconciliation, and concern for others?

How do we model corporate hospitality to God, self, and others? (This can be worked out further in the following pages.)

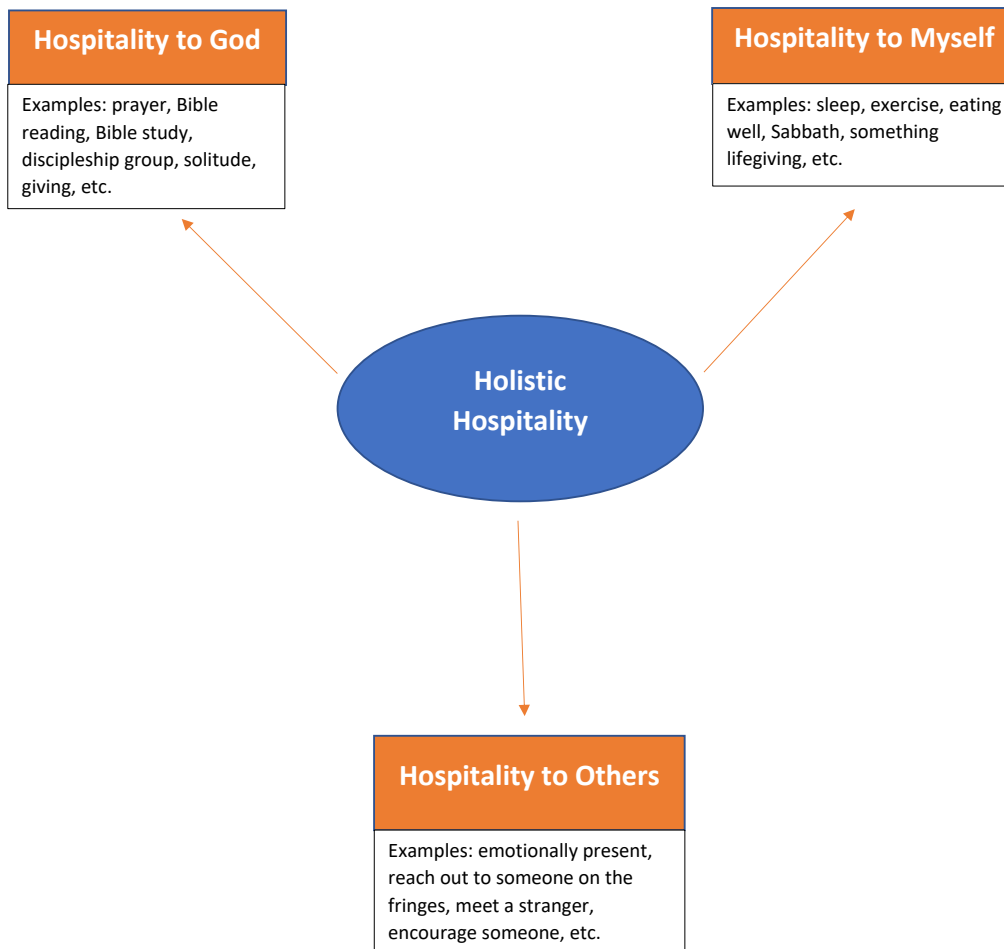
How do we encourage our members to engage in personal hospitality to God, self, and others? (This can be worked out further in the following pages.)

How do we model lament/confession as a form of hospitality?

How do we stay intentional about hospitality at our fellowship events—particularly in older churches that have deep rooted friendships? How do we facilitate these events so that people engage with those they don't know as well?

RULE OF LIFE WORKSHEET (Individual)

Instructions: Use this worksheet to brainstorm the ways you would like to begin to live out holistic hospitality in your personal life



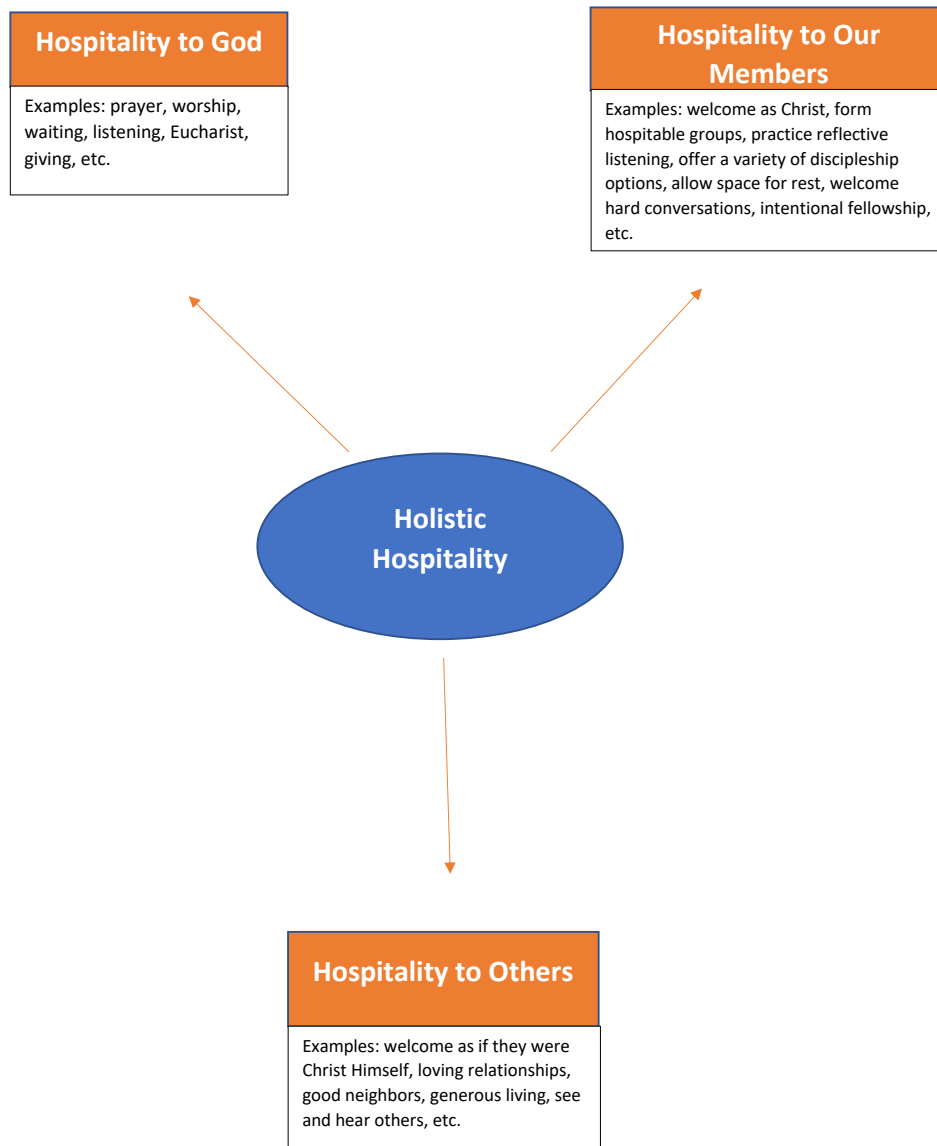
RULE OF LIFE ACCOUNTABILITY

Which practices from the previous worksheet are you committing to faithfully live out?
Use this form as a tool for accountability. It works best when you invite a friend to hold you accountable to your commitments.

Rule of Life – Personal						
Week of _____	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Hospitality to God						
Hospitality to Self						
Hospitality to Others						

RULE OF LIFE WORKSHEET (Corporate)

Instructions: Use this worksheet to brainstorm the ways you would like to begin to live out holistic hospitality corporately



RULE OF LIFE ACCOUNTABILITY

Which practices from the previous worksheet are you committing to faithfully live out?
Use this form as a tool for accountability. It works best when you commit to quarterly accountability with Church Board or Discipleship Team.

Rule of Life – Corporate						
Quarter of _____	Weekly	Bi-weekly	Monthly	Every Other Month	Quarterly	Other
Hospitality to God						
Hospitality to Our Members						
Hospitality to Others						

HOSPITALITY IS THE VOCATION OF THE CHURCH

A church with a culture of hospitality is a radiant reflection of the love of Christ. The early church was distinguished by the way they loved not just one another but even their enemies, and they consistently witnessed the way that holy love transformed enemies into friends. Divine hospitality is healing and attractive.

Hospitality is both an important part of our history and it is our vocation. Every follower of Jesus who wants to faithfully walk the discipleship journey with Christ is “sent by God on an errand to love God’s creation.”⁸¹ The hospitality of God calls us to co-participate with God’s Spirit to create the kind of world where average people describe the Christians they know as “tenderhearted, merciful, kind, humble, gentle, patient, forgiving, not easily offended, and not begrudging” and where they know “what we stand for and what we believe in (instead of what we’re against).”⁸² Our churches would be bursting at the seams if this were a reality for us today. Local churches that foster a culture of hospitality are living this kingdom reality and are continuously inviting people to join them in this important pilgrimage in faith.

It is my prayer that this humble resource can help your church engage holistically in hospitality and rediscover once again the hidden spiritual power in this Christian tradition.

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