

Draw Near 10

Hospitality, May 5

Purpose

The practice of hospitality...

Sharing Time

Review Devotionals: Has everyone completed some devotionals from this past week? There is no penalty for not completing them. They are there to help you and guide you. Let's share for a minute what we have learned from those you have done.

Learning Experience

Introduction: Jesus moves from preachin' to meddlin' halfway through the Sermon on the Mount. He does this in Matthew 6:19 where he begins to teach about our possessions. He teaches us to not be miserly, but to serve others, not money. We are to be generous, and we need not be stressed about our stuff - God will watch over all that. So the way we handle our possessions will reveal how we are doing in our relationship with God and with others.

There is a "dark side" and a "light side" to the discussion about money in the Bible. God issues warnings and outlines dangers associated with wealth, but he also reveals blessings and opportunities.

Notice these examples of the "Dark Side" of money:

- Matthew 6:19-20, 24
- Matthew 19:24
- 1 Timothy 6:9-10
- James 5:1-6
- All of these point to how we must be wary of riches and how they can tempt us to not depend on God for our sustenance. Of all that might distract us from God, money is at the top of the list.

But notice these examples of the "Light Side" of money:

- Luke 8:1-3
- Acts 4:36-37
- 2 Corinthians 9:11
- 1 Timothy 6:17-19

- It is obvious these are examples from people's lives where they had money and used it for the blessing of the church. God grants great joy when you give. Goods can be leveraged to bless God and those around us in a myriad of ways.

It is amazing how much stuff we have. Have you moved lately? Have you noticed how many boxes and how much truck it takes to move you? Our homes are larger than they have been in the history of the country, yet one of the largest industries of this country is storage facilities for all the stuff we can't fit into our homes! Do you possess things, or do they possess you? There is even a woman on Netflix who is making money by having a television camera follow her around as she helps people decide whether or not to keep something! Can you believe that?

Dallas Willard offers this useful assessment concerning how to know the difference between possessing riches, using riches, and trusting in riches:

To possess riches is to have the right to say how they will or will not be used. Possession is a neutral matter. Possessing riches can be either good or bad. It is simply having the authority to determine how something will or will not be handled.

To use riches is to cause them to be consumed or transferred to others in exchange for something we desire. Where possession merely indicates having a right to say how something will be used, use indicates actually taking that resource and using it for something we desire.

To trust in riches is to count upon them to obtain or secure that which we truly treasure. It is to think that riches will bring us happiness, well-being, and security. (from "The Spirit of the Disciplines", pages 194-95, by Dallas Willard)

The issue here is our attitude toward our possessions, not the possessions themselves. We could have a lot, or a little, but still have a problem. In summary, do we trust God? As Jesus points out in this section of Matthew, do we trust God to take care of us like he does the birds and flowers and all living creatures?

Hospitality

A rather simple spiritual practice that helps us mitigate against the "Dark Side" of money is the practice of hospitality. Hospitality is much more than opening the home or the feeding of a meal. It is "to be a safe person who offers others the grace, shelter and presence of Jesus." (Adele Calhoun) It is the offering of shelter, or food, or presence so that the person can experience Jesus while with us. Our goal is to allow others to enjoy Jesus' hospitality through our own hospitality.

When we love God and love our neighbor, we find ways to share hospitality with them, sharing our lives with them. This was the primary way the gospel was shared in skeptical cultures. Non-Christians were first reached through the care and hospitality of their Christian neighbors, sharing gospel through their lives, and only then were they ready to listen to the words of Jesus.

In the New Testament hospitality was modeled and commanded in scripture:

- Romans 12:13
- Hebrews 13:2
- I Peter 4:9
- Luke 14, Matthew 25 - practiced and commanded by Jesus

Christians have throughout the centuries practiced hospitality toward more than their own. They have always practiced it toward others as well. All human beings accept "our own" very well, but we have a tough time accepting "others." We, as Christians, are more readily accepting of people from different moral, ethnic, and social backgrounds. Hospitality is the front line of this embrace.

We can practice hospitality anywhere, from the home, to the room, to even emotional or mental space - such as our thoughts and feelings. Marjorie Thompson shares these five forms of hospitality which can help us understand how varied hospitality can be in the present day:

1. Hospitality at home means parents being genuinely present to their children and making the home a place where mistakes can be made and forgiveness can be granted. Hospitality at home can also include adoption of hard-to-place children, sheltering a homeless couple, or taking in a foreign student.
2. Hospitality in the workplace involves listening to others' ideas, concerns, and critiques. It means creating a welcoming and inviting environment for co-workers, supervisors, and customers.
3. Hospitality in the neighborhood can be expressed by watching a neighbor's home or pets when they are away, listening to a lonely neighbor, watching the kids of a single parent in the neighborhood, or throwing a block party for neighbors.
4. Hospitality in our churches takes place when we welcome visitors and newcomers, honor each member's gifts, deal appropriately with conflict, intercede for others, and treat church staff generously.
5. Civic hospitality involves creating schools, and providing medical care and recreation available for all; welcoming immigrants, the poor, and the undereducated.

Of course, the main issue with hospitality is, why are we not practicing it? How do we begin to practice hospitality? James Bryan Smith correctly points out that too

often we have a narrative playing in our heads that can tend to be negative, hostile toward others, who are not like us. And we might need to rewrite those stories. Though we are Christian, we sometimes slip up and think like the world thinks about the people who are different than us.

1. Some live by a false narrative of judgment. "God helps those who help themselves." So as long as this is true, then I don't have to help others. Once THEY show initiative, then I can start to help. But not before.
2. Some have the false narrative of scarcity. "If I give it away, I will have less." This is a belief that God is only able to help me with what I have, and not give me any more. I am afraid I will run out.
3. Some have the false narrative of entitlement. "What I have is mine to use for my own pleasure." Now if this were true, then I never need to share with others because I have worked hard for what I have. God has given it to me and I deserve it ALL.

We need to change each of these narratives:

1. The false narrative of judgment needs to become the true narrative of helplessness of people. "God helps those who cannot help themselves" (read your Prophets in the OT). Since I understand there are people who cannot help themselves, then I join God in helping them, with hospitality as one form of that. There are many different ways to help people, and hospitality is one of those ways. But it is obvious from scripture that though God does want us to work, he does not qualify his help on our work.
2. The false narrative of scarcity is replaced with provision. "If we all share, we will have enough." God is able to provide the community with plenty. God, who has no end of resources, will help us when we give away what we have. Look at the command for Sabbath, at the command for the Year of Jubilee. God was trying to show the Israelites that he was the God of abundance, not of scarcity.
3. The false narrative of entitlement will be altered to stewardship. "What I have is God's to use for his glory." I am now using everything to bring honor and glory to God. So I offer meals, bed, conversation, a ride, etc. I need to use what God has blessed me with in his kingdom - whether it is a house, or a car, or a moment in time.

Conclusion: Hospitality is one of those spiritual disciplines that challenges us all because it forces us to get outside ourselves and work to meet people we don't know and are not sure if we can trust. We open ourselves up to injury. God is good, but we know from the stories of scripture, he does not always protect you the way you might choose to be protected. Open your heart, open your home, see how God will bless you today.

Practice

1. I cannot emphasize enough that these practices are not to be done for God's approval - God already loves you as much as He will ever love you. These practices are for you! They will help you come to love God more, love life more, love others more, and love your possessions less.
2. This week you have a devotional on the back of the sermon outline. It has instructions on how to do it four times this week. Next week, as we come to class let's talk about what we experienced this week with God.
3. We have been given a wonderful gift. We have four great opportunities to use this gift this week. Be sure to find the 10 minutes on four days this week to practice this marvelous gift. Start today and do it!