

Ice Breaker Question:

Do you enjoy having people into your home or does it make you anxious or somewhere in between?

Read and discuss: Mark 12:28-31, Genesis 18:1-15

1. Hospitality of strangers is still virtuous in the Middle East. How did Abraham in Genesis 18 show hospitality to the strangers in the story? How does this story encourage you to show hospitality?
2. Abraham and Sarah offer food, "a choice tender calf," to the visitors. Sharing food with others is a common and important theme in the Bible. Why is food important to welcoming visitors, even today?
3. One definition of hospitality refers to the host receiving the guest with goodwill, kindness, and warmth; including the reception and entertainment of guests, visitors, or strangers. In trying to be good neighbors as God has called us to be, what do you think is most important about hospitality?
4. In Genesis 18, God shows up to Abraham and Sarah through three strangers. How might God show up in visitors to your home?
5. In the book, *The Art of Neighboring*, the authors say it is also important to let our neighbors serve us. This is the art of receiving. Can you describe a time when someone was hospitable to you?
6. What are the things that make hospitality a challenge to you? What current needs do you have that a neighbor might be able to help you with?
7. A couple of weeks ago we looked at the story of Mary and Martha. How are the actions of Martha and Abraham similar? How are they different? How do you explain the difference in the way God responds to them?

Prayer:

Keep the following prayer requests from our church family in mind as you close:

- > Prayers of healing for Laura Nelson, John Lindenschmidt, Pierce Robb, Hadley Lehr, Talbott Sumners, and Chuck Vogt.

Reminders for your group:

- > Blood Drive for Hadley Lehr | Sunday, May 22 | 9 am-2 pm | ZPC South Gym
- > Sign up to volunteer for VBS 2016 | Cave Quest | zpc.org

Homework:

In the next week or two, set up a time to get together with a neighbor, either at your home or at a coffee shop or restaurant.

Leaders notes:

Hospitality, the sharing of food, and kindness to strangers are all common biblical themes. Jesus is often shown in the New Testament sharing meals with friends and neighbors and being the recipient of or extending hospitality. As we are called to love God and love neighbor, we are called to learn more about hospitality and to practice it.

[Question 1] People in the Middle East were expected to welcome strangers, feed them, and welcome them. Meeting someone's need for food and sharing your home was one of the most intimate ways to obey God. Abraham bows low, offers abundant food, and stands by while the guests eat, probably hours later. If we can even show some of that hospitality to our neighbors, we are seizing opportunity to obey God and love neighbor.

[Question 2] Everyone loves to eat. Sharing food or even the cooking or preparing of food can be very personal. It feels even more personal in someone's home than a restaurant. To stand around someone's kitchen and eat appetizers is very personal, welcoming, inviting and "homey."

[Question 3] Some important things are sharing of yourself, being present, not being perfect in your home or presentation, providing a fun atmosphere, and being warm and friendly. Oh yeah, really good food, too.

[Question 4] If we help strangers, we may be entertaining angels unaware of doing so – read Hebrews 13:2. We may also be meeting Jesus by helping others in need of food, clothing, or shelter – Jesus himself says this several times in the gospels. It also gives insight to our own souls – by being vulnerable to inviting people in and welcoming them to our homes.

[Question 5] It is important for us to be open to allowing others to help us. Accepting other's assistance helps build community. Ask group members to share a time when they received help from another and what it was like for them.

[Question 6] Time or lack of motivation may be barriers for us in being hospitable. Which things are particularly challenging for you? Have group members share what some of their needs are. Whether it is house repairs, yardwork, watching your kids for an hour, or watching your house while on vacation, all of these can build closeness in neighbors.

[Question 7] Christianity is not a rules-base faith. It is a relational faith, which means there are times when you should be scurrying around and there are times when you should be there to listen. Re-read Genesis 18:8 and discuss any additional insights.