

Hospitality for Gospel Advance

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I occasionally travel around the country in order to teach the Bible in various settings, typically staying in the home of a pastor or church members. Looking back over several years of these experiences, I can confidently say that joyous hospitality is a boon to my ministry.



One of my favorite memories of hospitality happened last year. Jim Elliff and I were teaching in Texas, staying with Mr. and Mrs. Tinkle. The fellowship around the table was warm and engaging, but here's what I'll never forget: Mrs. Tinkle always had water bottles ready on the counter when Jim and I walked in after each day of ministry, plus warm towels awaited us at the bottom of the steps before we went upstairs to our rooms! We have no idea how she timed that so perfectly. We didn't need those special touches—some food, shelter, and a shower is plenty—but they were extremely kind expressions of love and appreciation.

I recently counted at least nine different people who received the Apostle Paul into their homes:

- Lydia (Acts 16:14-15)
- The Philippian jailer (Acts 16:34)
- Jason (Acts 17:6-7)
- Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:1-3)
- Titius Justus (Acts 18:7)
- Gaius (Romans 16:3)
- Philip (Acts 21:8-9)
- Mnason (Acts 21:16)

Hospitality was vital to gospel advance in Paul's life, and the same is true today for men who have a broader teaching ministry beyond their local church.

Not everyone has a home that is conducive to receiving guests, but perhaps you do. Have you offered to host that visiting missionary, or that conference speaker and his family? Why not let the leadership of your church know you would like to serve in that way if needed?

If you are already using your home for hospitality, keep it up! As John said, "Therefore we ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth" (3 John 8). Do it with joy, not grumbling (1 Peter 4:9). While you're at it,

you might throw in a few of your own "special touches." They will be appreciated very much!

Here are a few additional kindnesses I have experienced in my travels for ministry:

- *A basket with items such as fruit, granola bars, breath mints (or gum), and water bottles.* On a recent trip, I think I could have lived a week off of what they put in a basket. It wasn't necessary, but it was extremely considerate and I even had several items to take home to my children at the end of the trip. Of all of these "goodies," water is especially important.
- *Candy on the pillows.* This is a staple of my wife's hospitality, and I have experienced it several places when traveling. For some reason, that little piece of Hershey's chocolate tastes so good at the end of a long day of ministry.
- *Towels and a washcloth on the bed.* Having warm towels at the bottom of the steps probably isn't a realistic aim for most of us. However, placing a couple of fresh towels and a washcloth on the guest's bed before he arrives is doable.
- *A comfortable mattress.* Usually, the guest room gets "the old mattress." That can create a (back) problem! Also, sometimes the host family will have one of their kids sleep elsewhere and let the guest stay in the child's room, not knowing that the bed is only even if books are stacked, four or five high, all the way down one side of the bed (true story of a friend who will remain anonymous).
- *A note or an email before arriving.* A thoughtful man once wrote me just to say that his family was praying for my ministry in their church, and that it was an honor to host me. An organized woman once emailed to find out if I enjoyed half and half in my coffee. Neither had to do that, but both times I felt welcome before I even arrived.