



THE EXHORTER

“And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.” Acts 2:40

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1 Peter 4:9 “Be hospitable to one another without complaint.”

I was using this section of Peter in a lesson and this verse stuck with me. There is an interesting thought here that we ought to consider.

Hospitality, by definition, is entertaining strangers. The admonition for God's people to be hospitable is found throughout the New Testament. The Roman brethren were told to "practice hospitality." Bishops were to be known to be hospitable. The Hebrews were told to not "neglect hospitality." Peter, here in our verse, tells his readers to be hospitable to one another.

Often more good can be done through hospitality than in the church building. One on one, deeper conversations and personally tailored to what a person needs can be accomplished in the setting of a home that just doesn't work in the church building. Friendships are formed, spiritual ties are strengthened and love is expressed and shared through hospitality.

There are three thoughts I want to share about this.

First, hospitality takes a team effort at home. Mom and dad must be on the same page here. If you are inviting folks over, clean the place up, make it look inviting, work together in this way. One cooks and the other sets the table. One puts out more chairs and the other sees that things are just right. Don't go for over kill or try to impress someone like you are feeding the queen, that can kill the atmosphere of what you are trying to accomplish. It isn't a time to show off, but entertain. Get the kids involved in helping. This will be an example for them to learn as well.

Second, don't get in the pattern of just inviting your family and friends over. There is a need for that, but you miss out the joy of fellowship and helping others when you don't include others. Think of the older ones. Think of the widows. Think of the young couples. Invite, include and open your home and your heart. If there is a couple that is very shy, then include another couple that likes to talk. Having two or three families over allows people to get to know more and more people. For the shepherds of the congregation, this is a great opportunity to learn and see what is going on in the lives of some of the sheep. Don't just talk about yourself, let your guests talk. Get to know them. What a wonderful, wonderful occasion this can be.

Third, from our passage today, Peter adds, "without complaint." Be hospitable with one another, without complaint. I wonder why Peter had to add the "without complaint" part. I suppose it happened. I expect it continues to happen. This takes away the good that is done. I'm not sure the context allows us to know who was being complained to. Were they complaining to God? I tend to doubt that? More likely, it was to their family and friends. This is what we generally do.

Here are some of the complaints that they may have said. This is just things I thought up, but I believe they fit the situation.

- Why is it that we are the ones who always have people over? Why doesn't someone invite us once in a while?
 - Why do we always have to feed the visiting preacher? We hardly know him.
- Some people just stay too long and never go home.
- Some just talk and talk and talk and they never let anyone else talk.
- They don't even offer to help do the dishes where we are done.
- They never offer to bring something when we invite them.
- Their kids aren't very well behaved.

Oh, the complaints we can come up with. It's enough for some to not be hospitable. Some would say, "That's why we don't have people in our home." That's not good enough, nor right. The passage tells us that we need to be hospitable with one another.

Hospitality isn't limited to just feeding a family in your home. There are many ways to express love and kindness. Gifts purchased, sitting with someone in a surgery waiting room, sitting in a restaurant together, doing things together-but you pick up the tab. You be the generous one. You make the other one feel welcome and special. You share your heart with another. Pray together. Read passages together. Have enough people over to sing together. Laugh together, smile together, even cry together. It's the together part that makes hospitality special.

I have been on both ends of hospitality for years and years. As a preacher, I have been invited into so many homes through the years and have met so many wonderful families. It's great. Long after the meal is forgotten, the conversations, the ties formed are remembered. Friendships have been made. Encouragement shared. It's wonderful.

My wife and I have had lots and lots of people in our homes through the years. We purchased homes with the specific idea that the floor pattern is open and it flows well so when we have people over it seems comfortable. We've had everything from simple sandwiches to very fine meals-the food isn't the important part, it's the people. It's connecting, sharing and growing closer. We work like a team. I can't cook. It would be a disaster if that happened. But I can help get the house ready. And when folks leave, I can clean up. And I do. I don't let this all fall on her. We work as a team. I do what I do and she does what she does and it turns out to be a lovely evening with other folks. Sure it costs a little. Sure we get tired. But it is so worth it and we wouldn't have it any other way.

Be hospitable. Don't ruin it by complaining. Don't let the good be destroyed because of your attitude. Some folks might do well just to think of others once in a while. When you are invited to someone's house, don't be a hog at the feeding trough. I've seen that. A line of people behind one guy who has stacked his plate so high that you'd think he hasn't eaten in months. The folks at the end of the line worry if there will be anything left for them. I've actually seen a few occasions, when there wasn't. Be thoughtful of others. When you bring your children into another's home, watch them. Little fingers like to touch things and pick things up and that makes a couple without kids very nervous. Don't do all the talking when you are with others, and this is especially hard for us preachers. We excel in talking but sometimes we just need to listen. Be thankful that someone had you over. Compliment them and express your thanks. Don't return the favor because you feel compelled to. That ruins the atmosphere. Serve out of love. If you are asked to say the prayer at the meal, remember the occasion. It may not be best for a long, long prayer at that time. Don't damper the atmosphere by trash talking the church, the leaders or others not there. Don't turn the setting into a dumping ground. Make it positive. Make it beneficial. Make folks leave glad that they came. Just be thoughtful and think about things.

Be hospitable without complaint. How long has it been since you've shown hospitality? Maybe you can start the wheels working on that today for this coming weekend. Get thinking about what you need to do, who you need to invite and then get busy doing it. And don't forget Peter's words, "without complaint."

Roger Shouse