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MAKING ROOM

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Bringing Outsiders In

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Created by Megan Koch

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DiscipleshipPath.com provides an outcome-based pathway for one on one discipleship. This guided journey through the basics of the Christian faith is a mix of original and curated content created by the church for the church.

DiscipleshipPath.com was created by pastors Phil Wiseman and Megan Koch at Table Church in Des Moines, IA. You can contact them directly at hello@tablechurchdsm.org.

Table Church exists to invite people to the way of Jesus. We pursue God, create belonging, do justice, and make disciples. Find more discipleship tools at tablechurchdsm.org/resources.

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MAKING ROOM

Bringing Outsiders In

“When God’s people are in need, be ready to help them. Always be eager to practice hospitality.” – Romans 12:13

“Keep on loving each other as brothers and sisters. Don’t forget to show hospitality to strangers, for some who have done this have entertained angels without realizing it! Remember those in prison, as if you were there yourself.

Remember also those being mistreated, as if you felt their pain in your own bodies.” – Hebrews 13:1-3

“That is why the Good News was preached to those who are now dead—so although they were destined to die like all people, they now live forever with God in the Spirit. The end of the world is coming soon. Therefore, be earnest and disciplined in your prayers. Most important of all, continue to show deep love for each other, for love covers a multitude of sins. Cheerfully share your home with those who need a meal or a place to stay.” – 1 Peter 4:6-9

The gospel is the good news that God’s kingdom has come through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, who now rules over all. Therefore, we can be forgiven for our rebellion and enjoy a life with God in His kingdom. In other words, “Good news! Jesus is here. You’re not kicked out; you’re in.”

Evangelism happens every time we invite someone in to life with Jesus. And when they take us up on that, they don’t just get a seat at the table; they’re one of the family. They make themselves at home. They’re not an outsider anymore. They’re *in*. That’s what God did for you, and, *good news*, you get to make room for everybody else to join in too. The good stuff never runs out with God, so invite everyone you can. There’s always more than enough to go around.

This is how disciples are made. Disciples are children of God in the family of God, always eager to fill up seats at the table. When the kingdom of Jesus takes over our hearts, we don’t just get forgiven; we get a meal and a family. And it’s all so good, we’re constantly inviting more people in. We can’t help it. Nobody should miss out. Jesus is so full, there’s always more to share. That’s the spirit of hospitality. No matter who you are, you’re wanted here. There’s room for you. You have a place with us. There are no strangers in the family of God, just friends we don’t know yet.

Fred Rogers wrote, “When your heart has room for everybody, then your heart is full of love.” God’s love has room for everybody. God’s love is unconditional, and if you’ve received it, you’re called to let that love change you and move out of you to others. Everywhere, to everyone. No exclusions. Love is not earned, so it can’t be given out based on merit. God is not only loving, *God is love* (1 John 4:8). Life with God is a life of generous, unconditional love.

We are called to be peacemakers (Romans 12:18). Hostility is a sense of opposition or resistance to someone or something. Disciples don't choose to live in hostility toward God or anyone else. Is any part of your heart hostile to God? Do you ever keep God out or push him away? Is any part of you hostile toward a person, or a group of people? Are you shutting out anyone who needs to be welcomed in? *When your heart has room for everybody, then your heart is full of love.* Who is invited to your table? Who has eaten with you at your table this year? How about your relationships? Have you had a falling out with anyone that's left division between you? Are you willing to ask God to mend it? If your heart won't make room for everyone, then to some degree, all the love you give is *conditional*. You're making a judgement call, deciding who is worthy of love, and who is not. You're deciding who you have room for. This is not the way of Jesus.

To stretch this even further, we are not only called to actively love those we know, but to live with open invitation to strangers, foreigners, and outsiders. Romans 12:13 says, "When God's people are in need, be ready to help them. Always be eager to practice hospitality." The Greek word for hospitality in this verse is *philoxenia*. It means, "to receive and show hospitality to a stranger, that is, someone who is not regarded as a member of the extended family or a close friend." To show biblical hospitality is to receive a *stranger* as a *guest*. In sharing what is most dear to us, a moment of conversion happens: someone we once identified as a stranger is welcomed as a guest and is transformed into a friend. This is our own story as we were once outside the family of God, and have been welcomed in. God commands us to live out that story again and again with one another.

So how do we live this out? God is love, and he has the capacity to demonstrate active, perfect love to every person, all the time. God can do that. Love is not only what God does; it's who he is. He never gets tired. But when God commands *us* to love others, he isn't asking us to spread ourselves thin, or wear ourselves out trying to do his job for him. We aren't called to actively minister to every person on the planet all at once. But we *are* called to be open and generous. All the time. God is calling us to live out the spirit of hospitality with the people in front of us; ready to make room for *anyone*, at any time.

Hospitality is a position of the heart. Is your heart open? Are your hands ready? God is calling us to take a generous approach to everything we do, seeing this world and the people in it like he does. *God isn't asking us to exhaust ourselves by taking care of everyone.* He's calling us to keep the door open and a seat ready at our table. He's calling us to keep a reserve ready of all the goods we have (our food, our clothing, our money) so we are always ready to share with those in need. We don't love out of our own ability, and love rarely makes sense or seems fair. We love as we allow the life of Jesus in us to spill over to others. Your capacity to act is limited, but your ability to love unconditionally is not. Jesus will empower you to love like he does, if you let him.

JOURNAL responses to the prompts below.

1. What were your first thoughts as you read the essay? What stood out to you?

2. Evangelism and hospitality are often misunderstood in our culture. How would you define each of these terms? Has your understanding of each shifted over time? If so, how?

3. We introduced the Greek word *philoxenia*. It's translated as hospitality; to receive a stranger as a guest. Perhaps you've heard the word xenophobia before. It comes from the Greek term *xenos*, which means "stranger" or "guest", and *phobos*, which can mean "fear" or "flight." It essentially means "stranger fearing." Xenophobia is defined as, "fear and hatred of strangers or foreigners or of anything that is strange or foreign."

Consider every kind of "difference" you can think of between yourself and others. Think about cultural, political, and religious differences, but also differences in personality, lifestyle, etc. Have you ever experienced a fear of the "other"? If so, how? Who makes you uncomfortable? Who do you avoid? Why?

4. Pastor Jon Tyson said, "The credibility of our faith depends on the quality of our hospitality." Do you agree? Why or why not?

5. In Romans 12:13 Paul writes, "When God's people are in need, be ready to help them. Always be eager to practice hospitality." This specifically commands disciples to keep their doors and hearts open to the needs of God's people; in other words, other believers.

What does this tell us about the nature and value of Christian community in the family of God? How does this contrast with the attitudes you observe in our culture? What does our relationship with Jesus give us access to?

Paul specifically instructs Christians to open their homes to other Christians. Does this mean when it comes to nonbelievers, we can close our doors? (Think back to what we've learned about evangelism.)

6. Pause and ask God to help you clearly remember a time when you were an outsider, and someone welcomed you in. Perhaps you can clearly remember when you became a Christian; when you moved from outside the family of God to in, or time spent in another country or with people outside of your culture. Maybe you've experienced a season of loneliness, and in the midst of it, found a friend, or needed something, and a stranger's generosity met that need directly.

When have you been an outsider, and who invited you in? When have you been the recipient of a gift of generosity? What difference did that make in your life?

If this applies, consider writing that person a letter right now, or reaching out to them with a text or phone call. Thank them for welcoming you in, and helping you when you needed it.