

Hospitality the Renewed Vision

In church and ministry circles, there's a lot of talk about programs, ministries of the church and how that actually works. There might be planning, meetings. There might be goal. We sort of have a lot of talk about what's the goal, how does it work, how does it work within a local church, how do you set up ministries. Today, we're going to keep all of that discussion of goals and ministries and priorities as something very important. However, we're going to see all those goals and priorities through the perspective in the eyes of hospitality. I call this hospitality, the renewed vision. To kind of bring hospitality as the engine that runs so much of organizing the local church ministry effort.

The early church was known for hospitality. Not only do we have so many biblical references but I love the reference of Clement of Rome in 96 AD when he writes to the Corinth church. "Has anyone in these stayed with you without attesting the excellence and firmness of your faith? Without admiring your sensible and considerate Christian piety? Without broadcasting your spirit of unbounded hospitality?"

So it's fascinating. Three things are talked about. The first about your faith, your doctrine. The second is about your walk. Is it a walk based place? That's what piety means. These are people who walked. We talk about the sudden connections about a walk with God. The piety. But that third thing, the characteristic of the early church expanding is the unbounded hospitality. So a heart of hospitality. How do you think of ministry, church and ministry, through the eyes of the heart of hospitality? A church can have a great vision no matter what size. But if the church is not characterized by hospitality, friendliness, warmth, the church will not grow sustainably.

So we're going to talk today about the heart of hospitality. Now, the Bible talks about hospitality again and again. Romans 12:13, "Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality." 1 Peter 4:9, "Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling." 3 John 8, "We ought therefore to show hospitality to such men so they may work together for the truth." That's leadership hospitality. Even a qualification is an office bearer is a common thread is hospitality for all office bearers whether they're deacon or elder. Titus 1:8 eight, "Rather he must be hospitable. The one who loves what is good. Who is self-controlled, upright, holy in discipline." So an office bearer is one who practices hospitality.

So how do you make it that in your corporate culture, hospitality characterizes everything you do? When you think of a program underlying any program, any ministry is hospitality. So, what do you got to do? Well, as a pastor and a leader, train the people who are the connectors. These are the people people to introduce new people to existing attendees. What it is is identifying. First of all, let's say you're an extrovert. You can easily model hospitality. If you're an introvert or you're not as comfortable with people, there are people in your church who are comfortable with people.

You find those people. Have a meeting. And what you do is you create sort of a modeling of friendliness and hospitality in your local ministry. So that's a first thing. Find the connectors whether it's yourself or whether it's others and get them doing what they're created by God to do. Connect. Model hospitality.

Secondly, mobilize these leaders to do exactly what you did or what you helped some others to do. Try to get this concept of modeling and also finding leaders who will actually do this and mobilize them. Get them up there. Very important third thing is to recognize the leaders that you mobilized. As much as possible, even on a Sunday morning, say, "We really appreciate John who's out there meeting new people and meeting some of the new attendees and trying to encourage you to get connected."

And it might even not be a worship service. It might just be where you call that person up, and say, as it says in Romans 16:23, "Gaius, whose hospitality I and the whole church here enjoy, sends you his greetings." Now, you might call up John and say, "John, whose hospitality you've given to me as a pastor, and I've noticed that you have shared it with so many people in the church and I just want to call you and thank you for your major contribution". There are ways to recognize that Paul recognized Gaius. We need to recognize the leaders who practice hospitality.

So with that in mind, start thinking. Let's say you're going to start a new program or something. Start thinking that hospitality is the engine that starts the new program. There is a young man in our church to start a couple program in our church. And he came to me and he talked and he said, "I like to minister to young couples." And he had this idea, that idea, that idea, that idea, that idea. And I responded to him as, "Hey, why don't you just have..." This is a young man who has a young wife. They're a young couple. "Why don't you have another young couple over? Just to your house. Start with that." And the person, he said, "Oh, that's a really good idea."

So whatever programs we're talking about, let's start with hospitality. So meet with the leader and talk about the possible ministry or program. Okay? So they have a vision or you have a vision for a program, you can talk about it. Get the vision. Get the idea. That's number one. But where many times what people do is they will start promoting on the bulletin this program. What I'm saying is hold off on that.

And number two, do this instead. Identify people that the leader would have at their house or go out to eat with. So instead just promoting a program, actually identify that leader, who is maybe will run a program or start a ministry but then, help that person meet with some people first just for hospitality. Find out who they are. See what their dreams are. Maybe talk about the program. But when they talk about the program, talk a bit more like, "You know, I've been trusted in this, this, or this in our church. And wouldn't it be neat if the couples of our church would get together, support each other in their marriages for Christ?" So have people over.

Three, guide the hospitality to focus on the relational glue that precedes the vision glue. A lot of times we'd go at the vision and sell the vision the vision. The vision is really first and foremost and very important. But bring the vision in through actually connecting the people because at the end of the day, without hospitality in relationships and stuff like that, you're going to have the biggest vision.

In so many churches, you'll have like a vision that gets put in the bulletin. Nobody comes and the leader or is frustrated because nobody came to this ministry. Instead, train your leaders to first talk to people and share a little bit of vision with the people. One of the things about bulletins and announcements is they're often so impersonal. You put them in a bulletin and you say, "I put this in the bulletin but nobody came and I'll go back... No. Talk to people first. Make friends. Pray for each other.

Number four, each meeting, so you pray with each other. You talk to each other. So now there's a meeting that's going to occur that had all that hospitality groundwork laid. So now comes the meeting. So with the meeting or the program when it has its first meeting, right away, intentionally, put mixing time there instead of just saying, "Okay, we're in a Bible study. So everybody shows at Bible study. Do the bible study. Everybody leaves." The reality is there will be no glue. No mutual encouragement. That hospitality is not energizing it. And that program is going to be harder to sustain.

Number five, start encouraging and helping people to invite each other to homes again, to connect to each other, to meet in homes. So intentionally, if you have a church building, that's great. But try to also encourage homes. As a leader, you're kind of connecting people. But plant the idea of inviting each other over.

And lastly number six, you can do programs relationship driven with purpose. In a lot of ways, this is really the summary. You can have as much vision and as much intentional leadership with great ideas. But remember, it's about people. Church is about people. The body of Christ. Church is about finding each other's calling, gifts, dreams, passions and mobilizing people. So if you have a church where your church and ministry engine is hospitality, you can be just as vision-centered, just as, organized and all of those things.

But what I'm really saying is that hospitality, just like what Clement said, there's doctrine, there's faith, there's the connections, there's piety, but that hospitality is the glue. It's the zest that people have because they're going to go back and see people that care about them. People first want to be cared about that they matter as people. Then they're interested to look at where can I grow more or what can I learn more about. People precede programs. Programs do not precede people.