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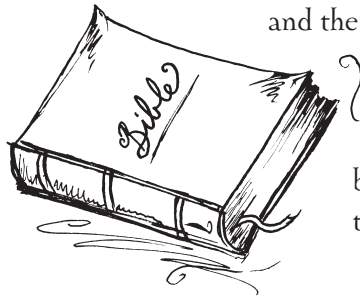
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Introduction

We've been duped. Yep. Conned by editors of glossy magazines into equating hospitality with exotic gourmet feasts served in extravagantly decorated dining rooms. Since we quickly realize that those articles and their fancy photos set up a standard that is impossible to meet, we figure we're off the hook, right? Wrong!

It is time to dispel the magazine myth of hospitality and get back to biblical basics. The Bible is full of reminders to open our homes and our hearts to others. God told the Israelites not to harvest all of the grain in their fields but to leave some for the poor and the foreigners, treating



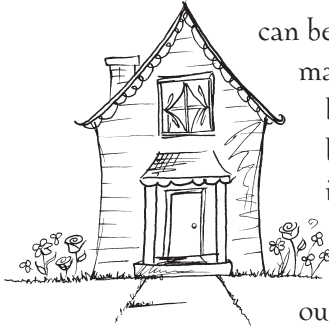
them kindly as they would have liked to have been treated when they lived as foreign-

ers in Egypt. Several times in their letters, the apostles Paul, Peter, and John encouraged the early believers—who often lived in extreme poverty—to invite folks into their humble homes. Of course, those letters were written for us too. Just after the apostle Peter says to “love each other deeply,” he reminds believers to “offer hospitality to one another without grumbling” (1 Peter 4:8-9).

The key to being hospitable, then, is grounded in loving others rather than owning and showing off an exquisite, perfectly decorated house. What exactly does it mean to be hospitable? The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines it as being, “friendly, kind, and solicitous towards guests.” I would add that it involves being sensitive to those who are needy, initiating invitations and obeying God when he urges you to reach out to someone.

Our home, which really belongs to God,





can be a conduit of blessings to many. Our living room may be the most comfortable location to hold a Moms in Touch meeting. The kitchen table may be the ideal location to sit with our friend after she's just been told she has cancer. By getting our minds off our shortcomings and ourselves we are free to help others.

This book is not a set of hard-and-fast rules to follow with recipes requiring a gourmet kitchen. It is about how the Janssen Five (that's my family!), in our modest, nondescript home on Nevermind Lane, have learned to follow God's leading in opening our home and the practical lessons we have learned that make it easier every time.

First we'll take an honest look at the very real pressures that may be preventing you from

opening your home to others. We'll also discuss why it is worth making the time and effort to practice hospitality. And if you've ever been tempted to hide in your coat closet when the doorbell rings, you may benefit from my tips on making your home ready for friends who may show up unexpectedly.

Once your heart and home are ready, you can begin trying out the hundreds of hospitality ideas presented in this book. Many are quite simple; others may be most appropriate only when you have lots of time (or ambition!). The appendices provide reproducible planning lists that you can use whenever you plan a dinner party, birthday party, or shower.

The Janssen Five relish just about every aspect of opening up our home (housecleaning being the one drawback). I attribute it to my rich heritage. Growing up as a preacher's kid (and grandkid), hospitality was an integral part of life. Visitors to our small church were invited

to Sunday dinner in our home. Counseling occurred around our dining room table on weeknights. A cup of coffee or a glass of cold water was offered to all who stopped by for “a short visit.”

Perhaps you don’t share my rich background. You may find the whole concept of hospitality frightening or overwhelming. What will people think of our humble home and stumbling attempts? Who has time for guests with all the housekeeping, carpooling, and outside commitments at church, our kids’ schools, and possibly to our employer? Yet God makes it very clear in his Word that we are to practice hospitality, have a servant’s heart, and give generously of ourselves and our resources.

The more you practice hospitality, the more comfortable you will become. After a while you will realize that most people are thrilled that someone invited them over. No

one has judged your décor or cooking! When you do not mention the stain on your sofa, nobody else notices it, either. As you begin to get your mind off yourself and concentrate on others, you will learn to savor the joys of hospitality—not to impress, but to bless!



“Business! . . . Mankind was my business. The common welfare was my business; charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence were all my business. The dealings of my trade were but a drop of water in the comprehensive ocean of my business!”

—MARLEY’S GHOST TO SCROOGE,
A CHRISTMAS CAROL BY CHARLES DICKENS

Elly Parker grudgingly opened her tired eyes to glare at the alarm clock. 6:30 A.M. She had just fallen into a deep, dreamless sleep when that annoying buzzer beckoned her to get up. A good night’s rest had eluded her as she worried about the day to come. This was the day the pastor and his family were coming for dinner, and Elly wanted to impress them.

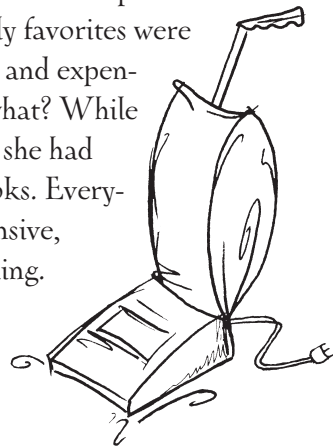
Instead of sleeping Elly had tossed around dinner menu options. She had never had anyone over for dinner before but according to the



Chapter I Hospitality—Why Bother?

magazines she read, fancy foods were expected. She felt that all her usual family favorites were too humble. Something showy and expensive had to be prepared. But what? While watching TV the night before she had thumbed through her cookbooks. Everything looked so difficult, expensive, complicated, and time consuming.

Besides the menu, other concerns kept her awake. When would she find time



to clean the house, do the grocery shopping, set the table, and cook dinner with all the other commitments she had? Could she get out of driving for the fourth-grade fall field trip at the last moment? Was there time to buy new dishes? Could her budget handle all the costly foods *and* new dishes?

Twelve hours later Pastor Sam Schubert, his wife, Sally, and their two toddlers arrived a fashionable five minutes late. Elly's long-suffering husband, Paul, welcomed them at the front door and invited them to sit in the living room. The room smelled like it had just been vacuumed and indeed the vacuum cleaner was still warm. Paul offered their guests soft drinks. They accepted. Paul went to the kitchen to fetch them. There he found his bedraggled Elly up to her elbows in strange salad dressing ingredients amid three open cookbooks and piles of dirty dishes. It didn't look like dinner would be served any time soon.

Paul valiantly returned to the Schuberts to try to keep them entertained until dinner. Conversation canvassed everything from Creation to conservation to conservatives. Elly would have enjoyed it if she hadn't been struggling in the kitchen to get the new food processor running. The Parker kids played with the visiting toddlers who soon became hungry and restless.

Sally eventually popped into the kitchen to see if she could help. Elly firmly denied any need of assistance. Sally wondered what had come over her usually placid friend and felt it safest to leave her alone.

Ninety minutes passed before dinner was announced. The hungry mob was in the mood to eat just about anything, but after grace Elly's kids loudly questioned the identity of the suspicious green unlettucey-looking stuff in the salad. The pastor's toddlers followed suit and refused to eat it. The basket of hard rolls emptied fast.

The ensuing dinner presentation would have made any professional cook proud. The standing rib roast majestically stood amid a wreath of parsley. The asparagus, though cold, was attractively arranged with swirls of yellow sauce on top. Exotic spices made the potatoes out-of-this-world delicious—to a discerning, sophisticated palate. Unfortunately, the table was surrounded with regular folks.

During the meal poor Elly constantly rushed between the dining room and kitchen. She hardly had a minute to enjoy the fruits of her labor much less the pleasure of visiting with her company. Besides that, she seemed angry, mumbling things like, “I have to do everything around here,” and “Can’t Paul see that I need help?” The tone of the evening became strained at best.

When one of her kids accidentally spilled his drink, Elly came unglued. Her freshly

ironed tablecloth was a mess! Why couldn’t he be more careful! Her son stood in the corner for fifteen minutes as punishment. Everyone was embarrassed—not by the spilled milk but by Elly’s overreaction. The ambiance took another dive.

Using toddler bedtimes as an excuse, the pastor and his family left as soon as the last bite of rich dessert was gone. They seemed glad to leave. Sally told Elly that she would like to get together with her again sometime. Perhaps a coffee-shop date?

As soon as the door closed behind the Schuberts Elly buried her head on Paul’s broad shoulders and had a good cry. The evening had been a disaster! What would they think of her?! She was a failure! How could she ever show her face at church again? It was quite a pity party. Paul just held her and prayed. He knew Elly would be more objective and teachable after a good night’s rest.

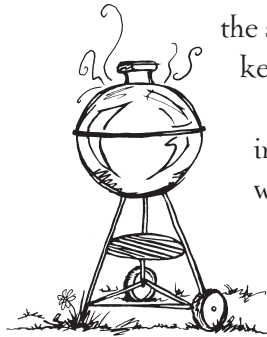




Elly had a lot to learn about hospitality. The Schuberts didn't make a quick exit because they didn't like the asparagus dish. They left because they felt like an inconvenience to their hostess. Elly stumbled because her mind-set was out of kilter with the mission of hospitality.

We shouldn't be too quick to judge Elly, however. Like her, many of us rarely invite others into our homes because we are so busy with other responsibilities. When we do extend an invitation, we are often plagued with the same doubts and insecurities that kept Elly awake all night.

So before we even venture into the "how-to's" of hospitality, we need to address the basic question: Why bother? We'll do this by considering seven key questions.



WHY SHOULD I SHARE?

Everything belongs to God.

Psalms 24:1 says, "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it." Colossians 1:16 adds that "all things were created by him and for him." Without the Creator you would have nothing. Any good blessing you can mention is a gift from God for you to use for his purposes. This includes your home, the food in your fridge, and your time. Yes, you get to use them, but in truth you are merely a steward of his good gifts. How are you using your God-given home?

Many Christians have a dedication ceremony when they move into their new home. At ours we recognized that our modest "fixer-upper," like everything else we own, in reality belongs to God and is to be used for furthering his kingdom. Your home isn't just where you unwind at the end of a long day; it is a gift from God meant to be used for his service. Viewing

it with that attitude can transform how you use your home.

God has richly blessed you for a reason. Other people are that reason. Once you accept that, you'll begin thinking how you can use your home to reach out to others. The extra bedroom becomes "The Missionary Room." You arrange your living room furniture so that it is conducive for conversation because you want to be able to comfortably listen to and pray for a hurting friend. You move the china cabinet into the living room so you can fit a larger table into the dining room where more people can be seated. You choose carpet based on how well it hides dirt rather than its color or texture. (You will find more specific help for making your home hospitality-friendly in chapter 2.)

I often hear people say that they do not have time to practice hospitality. They are really saying that it is not a priority. Loving and caring for others is mentioned—perhaps

I should say commanded—so often in Scripture that opportunities to do so should be on our mind constantly. Often the biggest obstacle to obedience is our to-do list, which is generally filled with a list of tasks rather than the names of people. Many of those things could wait another day while you minister to the people God has put in your life today. Better yet, put hospitality on your to-do list.

WHY SHOULD I CARE?

People have eternal value.

Eternity will be spent with *whos*, not *whats*.

People have eternal value. Things do not.

Reality Check

- Whatever you have is good enough.
- Your furniture does not have to match, look nice, or be new.
- Your attitude is what is important. Welcome all visitors with a smile, open heart, and generous soul. That is what they will remember.





In 2 Corinthians 5:15-16, Paul reminds us that Christ “died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. *So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view*” (italics mine).

I receive much more joy from my relationships than I ever will from my stuff. When I count my blessings, they all have a first and last name. My fondest memories all revolve around loved ones, and many of the best are times when I opened my home to bless others, only to find myself abundantly blessed by my guests.

Last year some friends from Oregon spent a few days at the Janssen B & B. We wanted to give them a lovely time because we knew that they had been experiencing some difficulties in their marriage. Also, we were aware that one of their children had spent the last ten years struggling with depression. While they were with us, our friends immediately recognized

the symptoms of depression in one of our own children, who was going through a difficult time. They were able to counsel and encourage us. It was obvious that God had put them in our lives just when we needed them.

Quite often we can use our homes to meet the needs of people and practice hospitality. By the way, when Jesus told us to be hospitable, he didn’t say we should wait until our living room furniture matches so we won’t be embarrassed. That leads me to the next principle.

WHAT IF MY HOUSE ISN’T PERFECT?

Be content.

“Be content with such things as ye have” (Hebrews 13:5, KJV). Whether you live in a cozy cave or a crumbling castle, God has put you there right now, doing his ministry with what he has provided. The apostle Paul received guests while he was in prison. We should never be embarrassed by our homes.



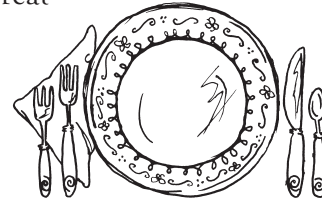
Look at your home through the eyes of ministering instead of comparing it to the pictures in glossy decorating magazines. The family you invite for Sunday dinner will not care if they sit on unmatched chairs and eat off a variety of cheap dishes. They will just be tickled that someone actually had them over for a meal!

My grandma Pulsipher lived the last fifteen years of her long life in a single-wide mobile home. She welcomed many into her cozy place for coffee and counseling. I remember drinking tea served in china cups at her tiny table. She never apologized for her humble home—she just kept ministering.

Practicing contentment frees us up to do more important things. Which has greater eternal value: shopping for the perfect rug or hosting a Bible study in your home? It requires a great deal of time, energy, and money to keep up with the Joneses.

Are you content with your home or do you rearrange numbers until you can barely qualify for a bigger mortgage and nicer digs? I know a few people who live in posh neighborhoods but have gone into serious credit card debt because their house payment takes up so much of their monthly income. The financial pressure creates family discord, and the hopelessness of the situation is constantly on their minds. Their luxurious master bedroom is no longer conducive to sleep. Great house. Crummy life.

Right now much of my family's money is designated for educating our three children. That leaves very little for accumulating bigger and better things, but we always find a way to practice hospitality. Our values and contentment foster creativity.



WHAT IF I DON'T HAVE MUCH MONEY
TO ENTERTAIN OTHERS?

Make the most of what you do have.

Jesus served five thousand men, along with an untold number of women and children, with a few loaves of bread and fishes. You may not be able to perform that miracle, but you may be surprised at what you can do if you get creative. In chapter 4 I will show you how to expand a typical family dinner to accommodate an extra guest or two.

You may think you simply do not have the right dishes, decorations, etc., to have dinner guests. Be content with what God has given you and look at what you do have through new eyes. Sheets for a tablecloth, wildflowers for a centerpiece, a set of mismatched teacups, and eating on a blanket in the middle of the living room floor can all be quite charming. I still remember when friends invited Al and me over to test a new recipe and ran out of

dinner napkins. We cheerfully used kitchen towels instead.

My in-laws owned beautiful silver and gold flatware, an amazing array of hand-embroidered table linens, and lovely china. But they never used them. My husband had never even seen them until his mother gave them to me as gifts. Al's parents rarely entertained and when they did, they did not want to bother getting out the dishes and silverware. I want to encourage you to use those family heirlooms and wedding presents. Serving macaroni and cheese on china elevates the mundane to elegant.

Candlelight creates a special ambiance no matter what the rest of the environment looks like. A few dried flowers in a jam jar make a centerpiece. Coffee mugs can be used for soup bowls. An unmatched set of chairs, dishes, glasses, flatware, or napkins is so much more interesting than a perfectly coordinated one.

When you decide to serve pizza because



you would not have enough forks to go around if you served anything else, it pays to have a sense of humor. That brings me to my next point.

WHAT IF MY PARTY DOESN'T GO PERFECTLY?

Rejoice evermore!

The Bible tells us how to react to anything life brings us: “Rejoice evermore. . . . In every thing give thanks” (1 Thessalonians 5:16, 18, KJV). Have a sense of humor. Things will go wrong. You will forget your best friend’s name, ruin dinner, have plumbing problems, and so on (just hopefully not all on the same evening!). The best reaction to life’s little disasters is to laugh. It lightens up the atmosphere. It creates a memorable moment. It proves that you are humble and imperfect but that’s okay with you.


One of our funniest memories is the time our oven caught fire. One fall Saturday afternoon Al was at home helping a professional

baseball player and his wife plan the book they were to write. I had decided to put together a lasagna dinner that evening to cap off the day of work. Instead I woke up feeling awful. I called my neighborhood Italian restaurant and ordered lasagna, salad, and bread sticks. When it came to dessert, I figured I had enough energy to make my favorite carrot cake.

Have you ever noticed that many recipes give special instructions for those living in high altitudes? My family lives in Colorado so those instructions apply to me. Unfortunately, I had not baked this recipe since moving to my new mile-high home and forgot to make any adjustments. Consequently, the cake overflowed rather dramatically. I was able to rescue the cake by topping it with a generous amount of cream cheese frosting. But the oven was a mess.

I didn’t think too much about the oven until it was time to heat up the lasagna I had picked up. First I preheated the oven, of course. When





I opened the oven door to slip in the lasagna, I was greeted with flames—big, scorching, scary flames. To make the occasion even more interesting, Al and our guests were standing right there, with front-row seats to the impressive conflagration. Without meaning to, I certainly impressed and entertained my guests!

The flames subsided once I closed the oven door but that didn't solve the problem of how to heat up dinner. I phoned my next-door neighbor and explained the situation. She was glad to lend me her oven, but she did want something in return—the autograph of our well-known guest. He agreed, probably motivated by hunger.

Actually we were all getting a bit famished so we ate the salad and bread sticks to tide us over. We were just finishing our salads when my neighbor appeared with the lasagna. *That didn't take very long to be warmed up*, I thought to myself.

Well, it wasn't. My neighbor just could not

wait another minute to meet our guests and get the promised autograph. After she left we ate the lukewarm lasagna and laughed. What else could we do?

We still laugh at the memory of amusing our major league friends with the oven fire. I could not have planned a more memorable and hilarious time if I had tried!

WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?

It really is more blessed to give than to receive.

So far we've concentrated on how others benefit from our hospitality. However, we also gain when we obey the call to hospitality. Jesus' words hardly need explaining: "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot

repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous” (Luke 14:12-14). Jesus also said, “Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you” (Luke 6:38). How’s that for a return on your investment?

One night I asked my family what benefits they think our family has gained by practicing hospitality. My son Josh said it is a great way to spend quality time with friends. My husband, Al, mentioned that a meal with guests is usually bigger and better, and the leftovers are good too! Anna, my daughter, thinks it is fun to meet new people.


Al and I agree that we have deeper and more meaningful friendships because we have invested the time it takes to build those relationships. Our growing circle of friends includes many people to whom we might not have natu-

rally reached out to except for our desire to obey that still, small voice of God. Our views and understanding of the world have expanded because our guests have shared their varied lives with us. Our compassion for others has grown as we understand the tough situations others live in.

Although we have not seen much of the world, individuals from all corners have brought their piece of the world to us. Because of them we have insights into the difficult lives of our persecuted brothers and sisters in Christ all over the world. Their stories of family, culture, and community have broadened our experiences. We feel more connected to our global Christian family. There is no telling how this has influenced our impressionable children over the years.

By inviting people into our homes we have gotten our minds off ourselves (an unhealthy place to dwell, anyway) and onto the needs of others. This simple Christian concept has side





benefits. It combats loneliness. It puts our lives in perspective. And we end up feeling better for having done the right thing.

Like many Coloradans, we live hundreds of miles from relatives. To fill in for them we invite a houseful for holidays. The friendly mix creates a festive holiday mood. We can play more games, feast on different foods, and just have more fun when our home bursts at the seams with friends.

Hospitality has provided a creative outlet for the whole family. My daughter loves to decorate for her thematic birthday parties. Designing and making the decorations on a budget stretches her. All my children have been called upon to entertain the children of guests. Some of those tots require a lot of quick, creative thinking to keep them occupied. Coming up with last-minute centerpieces, adequate seating, recipe substitutions, and stretching meals call up all my creative juices.

Probably the greatest benefit Al and I have seen is the growth of our children. No, they haven't always handled every situation perfectly, but all three have learned well the fine art of being hosts and hostesses. They now think of others' needs before their own. Their manners constantly improve. Their world continues to expand as they discover a broader set of interests than their usual circle of friends provides.

Watching my kids in action when their friends are in our home warms my heart and thrills my soul. I've seen Jonathan sacrificially give up the last chocolate chip cookie. Anna has conscientiously watched to ensure all twelve of her party guests feel included. Joshua has given up his seat and offered a beverage to a late arrival without prompting. Yes, I am one proud mom.

WHAT'S THE BOTTOM LINE?

Remember, it is not about you.

It is not about how well you can cook. It is not

about how well decorated or how large your home is. It is not about how well the event goes or how impressed your guests are.

It is not about earning God's approval. It is an opportunity to bless others and honor God through the process of offering hospitality.

