

## What is Hospitality?

When many of us think of hospitality, our minds flit to pictures in magazines of beautiful, well-attended homes... tables set with matching plates and linens, a barbeque grill set up around the pool, or other such modern images of "entertainment". However, anyone who has thrown such a party knows that it takes work... alot of work... to pull off and thus, does not happen as often as we'd like.

Yet the Bible tell us in many places that we should offer hospitality.. that we should even be given to hospitality (Romans 12:13). What does that word "given" mean? According to Strong's, it means to "follow after" or "press toward". But that seems an impossibility, right? I mean, really, in today's day and age who has time to entertain all the time?

When I was younger, I was uncomfortable with guests. I have never been the best housekeeper, and if everything wasn't in its place I wasn't in the mood for guests, even kids my children wanted to bring home with them. On the other hand, I was uncomfortable telling people (even kids) they couldn't come to my home. It didn't sit well with me, having come from a family "given to hospitality", but I would just shrug and ask "How did Mom & Mamaw do it?" (My grandmother lived with our family from the time I was five.)

After all, my entire childhood was filled with people in and out of our house... some visiting... some visiting indefinitely. I can't even remember a time as a child when someone outside our immediate family wasn't living with us, often occupying the couch for months at a time. Not too long ago, I visited my mother & grandmother, who still live together three hours away, and while we were standing in the kitchen, some strange guy walked up the steps, got something out of the refrigerator, and walked back down, closing the door behind him.

"Who was that?" I asked, since the dude hadn't even glanced our way.

Mom waved her hand at the door where he had just disappeared. "Oh, that's just Smoky. He lives in the basement."

That's all she said.. lol! I just shook my head. Folks are STILL moving in with Mom and Mamaw. (Smoky happened to be a friend of my brothers-in-law who was down on his luck and needed a place to stay.)

I will say that even though my mother and grandmother are both widows and live "alone", they are never lonely or without care. Along with their own family, people visit them all the time. One of the now grown men they took in as a teenager lives nearby. He checks in on them every day &

does whatever heavy work they have. On Valentine's & Mother's Day, their table is filled with candy & flowers. Folks love my mother and grandmother. They truly are reaping the harvest of what they have sown for so many years.

But I digress. Back to the question, "How did Mom & Mamaw do it?" When I finally thought about it... really thought about it... I realized they didn't do anything at all except love people enough to share what they had. They never decorated or cooked up a special meal. Their plates didn't match and we certainly didn't have any fine silver. We didn't even have a pool (though we loved our old charcoal grill). My mom, dad, & grandmother just opened the door to whomever stood outside and invited them inside to share in their lives.

Once that realization was made, hospitality became easier for me. Not easy, mind you, because I am a highly co-dependent person (meaning I have a great need for people to like me and hold me in high esteem), but over time I have learned to relax, take off the mask, and let people into my home to see me as I truly am.

Everyone who knows me will tell you I'm inconsistent. I am not a great housekeeper. I spend too much time on the computer. I have a lot of faults. But that doesn't seem to matter at all to the dozens of teenagers who spend much of their time here (and have for several years). They feel comfortable enough that they don't knock when they come to the door (I tell them to come on in; otherwise, I'd be up and down answering the door all day long). If they're hungry, they find themselves something to eat. If they're sleepy, they lie down and take a nap. They feel at home here. Most of them call me "Mom".

I believe I have found the key to hospitality: along with the willingness to share your home and resources, the ability to give up all your pretensions... to be who you are and nothing more and give people the chance to love you despite your imperfections.