

Semicontinuous

Jer. 2:4–13

Ps. 81:1, 10–16

Complementary

Sir. 10:12–18 or

Prov. 25:6–7

Ps. 112

Heb. 13:1–8, 15–16

Luke 14:1, 7–14

Gospel Hospitality

Goal for the Session *Adults will imagine how individuals and communities of faith might demonstrate Jesus' words on humility and hospitality through modern-day practices.*

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on Luke 14:1, 7–14

WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” Rodney S. Sadler Jr.

Verses 12–14 also continue this counterintuitive message, telling us that our own tables should be surrounded by strangers, who are the “poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind,” in essence. We should populate our tables with those who are at the greatest social disadvantage. Although this instruction is patently this-worldly in its orientation, it says something about the nature of God’s reign as well; it lets the hearer know that the attributes ascribing favor in this world are not the same as those that do so at the coming feast. Those viewed as lower are to be treated with greater respect, to receive greater favor, and to enjoy places of honor in our own lives!

WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” Emilie M. Townes

The realm of God is also about how God offers an invitation in our lives to receive a genuine blessing when we learn that it is crassly unfaithful to store up spiritual points to note our goodness and then make it worse by ostentatious displays of that goodness. Receiving a blessing that invites us to grow into a deeper relationship with God is not something we can work our way into through acts designed to display our worth. No. God asks us to live into our createdness through our everyday acts toward each other and in and through our relationship with God and creation. Jesus wants us to understand that our all-too-human drive to seek the best seat in the house or at the party will not mark genuine participation in God’s mercy or love.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” Charles E. Raynal

Luke gives beautiful testimony to this barrier-breaking hospitality in the account of the journey of Mary and Joseph from Nazareth to Bethlehem, where she gives birth and lays Jesus in a manger “because there was no place for them in the inn” (2:1–7). The birth of Jesus thus breaches the blockade of welcome for the babe at the inn and embodies royal David’s line in an unexpected way. The hospitality of the manger becomes a paradigm for Luke’s particular emphasis on the welcome of the stranger and the communion at table that breaks down the barriers at the borders to human community and overcomes the constrictive exclusions of fear and loathing in the world.

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

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Jesus’ challenge reaches across boundaries of place and time, calling us to be more aware of those from whom we are inclined to avert our eyes, and to follow him rather than those who baptize common prejudices as virtues. We who “have been baptized into Christ Jesus” (Rom. 6:3) are called to conform to him and to his ways. To live into our baptism is to be ever mindful of those who are typically left out. (“Do not be conformed to this world” [Rom. 12:2].)

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

Luke 14:1, 7–14

Focus on Your Teaching

Humility can be difficult for adults. For some, conceit stands in the way of valuing humility in one's own life. For others, lack of self-esteem misidentifies humiliation as humility. In either case, struggles with one's own humility create barriers to extending gracious hospitality to others. In today's focus scripture, Jesus blends teachings on humility and hospitality in challenging ways. Adults accustomed to holding privileged places in community and serving as "gatekeepers" into it may find Jesus' words to be impractical or seditious.

Gracious God, I thank you for your invitation to lead this session for the good of those whom you will gather. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- Bibles
- copies of Resource Sheet 1
- copies of Resource Sheet 1 for the next session

For Responding

- option 1: Resource Sheet 2, pens or pencils
- option 2: Resource Sheet 1

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, arrange a tight circle of chairs, and scatter the rest of the chairs around the room. Make sure that the inner circle will seat less than half of the participants.

Welcome participants as they enter. Direct adults to find a seat, but not change the seating arrangements or move any of the chairs. When all have been seated, introduce any guests or visitors to the group.

Have adults reflect on today's seating arrangement by raising the following questions:

- ✧ What are the benefits and drawbacks of sitting in the "inner circle?"
- ✧ What are the benefits and drawbacks of sitting on the seats scattered around the room?
- ✧ How does sitting where you are right now make you feel about yourself; about this group?

Invite adults to return the chairs to their normal arrangement and be seated. Note that in today's focus scripture, Jesus utilizes seating arrangements at a table to blend teachings on humility and hospitality.

Offer these or similar words in prayer:

God, whose grace makes a place for us and for all, open us to the words and ways of Jesus before us today. Amen.

EXPLORING

Have a volunteer read aloud Luke 14:1. Invite adults to reflect on the closing detail of context in that verse of Jesus being "closely watched" by asking these questions:

- ✧ Why might these individuals be watching Jesus closely, and for what purpose?
- ✧ Put yourself in Jesus' place. How might being "closely watched" affect what you will say or do, and why?

Form two groups. Assign one group Luke 14:7–11 and assign the other group Luke 14:12–14. Explain that each group is to create a dramatic role-play or acting-out of Jesus’ teachings in their assigned text. Direct the groups to take into consideration in their preparations and presentations the context of Jesus being watched closely, and how they see that detail playing into their assigned text.

Have each group act out their portion of the narrative. Then invite responses to the presentations by discussing these questions:

- ✧ How did the other group’s presentation help you understand what Jesus was and was not teaching about humility or hospitality?
- ✧ What question would you have liked to ask Jesus about the teachings played out by the other group?
- ✧ What did you learn about Jesus and his teachings on humility and hospitality from your group’s presentation?
- ✧ What question would you have liked to ask Jesus about the passage you helped present?

“There are in Luke more references to eating, banquets, tables, and reclining at tables than in any of the other Gospels . . . [these are] one of our Lord’s key loci for teaching (22:24–30), reproving (11:37–41), and encountering those who are marginalized (7:[36],39).”¹

Have the volunteer who read verse 1 aloud earlier do so again. This time, focus the ensuing conversation on the context being that of a meal by relating the information in the sidebar. Underscore the significance of this context in Luke by having participants look up the sidebar references from Luke along with 5:29–32, 7:34, and 13:39. Discuss ways in which these other connections of meals with Jesus’ ministry or teachings connect with today’s focus scripture. Have adults reflect in broader terms on what it is about tables and meals that might lend them to serving as settings for Jesus’ ministry and teachings in Luke.

Review the conclusion to the parable of the Wedding Banquet in 14:11. Discuss:

- ✧ What insights are revealed in the parable as to what “humble” or “humility” involves?

Compare verse 11 with the song of Mary’s mother in Luke 1:47–53, particularly verse 52. Discuss how Mary’s song might help us better understand this parable on humility.

Invite adults to imagine themselves in the place of the Pharisee who hosted this meal.

- ✧ How would you feel about Jesus’ version of hospitality in verses 12–14?
- ✧ What might incline you to practice such hospitality; why?

Affirm that it was not this Pharisee alone to whom Jesus was addressing this invitation to gospel hospitality. Distribute Resource Sheet 1 (Focus on Luke 14:1, 7–14) and read the “What?” excerpt. Ask adults to silently reflect on the following:

- ✧ In what ways—at our tables, in our churches, through our lives—do we practice the hospitality and humility to which Jesus invites us in today’s narrative? And how might we broaden our practices of Jesus’ hospitality?

1. Rodney S. Sadler Jr., “Exegetical Perspective,” *Feasting on the Word, Year C, Volume 4* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 21.

EASY
PREP

“Humility is certainly a virtue, but exhortations to be humble can be dangerous to those who already have little sense of their own worth.”²

RESPONDING

Choose one or more of these activities depending on the length of your session:

- 1. Gospel Hospitality** This activity will encourage adults to reflect on personal and congregational practices of gospel hospitality. Distribute Resource Sheet 2 (Gospel Hospitality: Taking Inventory) and pens or pencils as needed. Review with participants the instructions in the opening paragraph. Provide time for individual work, then gather adults in small groups for consideration of the congregational inventory responses. Remind adults to do the assignment in the coming week on personal practices of hospitality as outlined in the third question under the individual inventory. Encourage adults to find a partner, or speak with the pastor, in order to devise ways to work for those changes.
- 2. Humility: Burden or Blessing** This discussion will help adults distinguish between helpful and unhelpful understandings of humility. Read the “Where?” excerpt on Resource Sheet 1, and then read the sidebar quote. Have adults relate situations where humility and low self-esteem have been detrimental to others or themselves. Discuss how the excerpt’s connection of blessing to humility might provide a helpful corrective in such situations. Ask adults in the coming week to focus on one particular action or challenge in their lives to exercise humility toward others that is not self-deprecating.
- 3. Host a Gospel Hospitality Meal** This activity will challenge adults to translate Jesus’ words about hospitality into a function of the church. Read Luke 14:12–14. Ask adults to imagine what it would be like to literally follow Jesus’ teachings by your congregation hosting such a meal. Develop a plan: who would be invited, how would the invitations be made, what steps would need to be followed to have the congregation host such a meal? Urge adults in the coming week to follow through on making the congregational contacts and seeing to it that this meal comes to pass.

CLOSING

Gather the adults in a circle. Ask adults to offer reactions to this day’s session and its focus on humility and hospitality.

Explain that today’s closing prayer will take the form of a litany. Individuals are encouraged to remember in prayer some insight into faith or discipline that they have found helpful from the past few weeks’ discussions. After each prayer, offer the following response: *In your name we have gathered, in your service we will go.* Practice the refrain so adults are comfortable with it, then lead the group in the litany by offering its first prayer. When all have had opportunity to pray, say: *Go in the grace and Spirit of God.*

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 for the next session, or e-mail it to the participants during the week. Encourage participants to read the focus scripture and resource sheet before the next session.

2. Ronald P. Byars, “Homiletical Perspective,” *Feasting on the Word, Year C, Volume 4* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 21.

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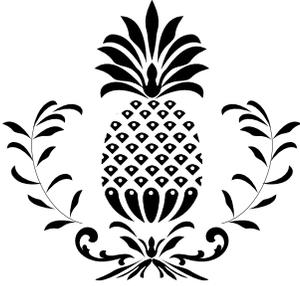
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Gospel Hospitality: Taking Inventory



What follows is an “inventory” or checklist of hospitality, both in terms of the hospitality you personally exercise and the hospitality exercised by this congregation. Write down your responses to the questions in each. Then gather in a small group that will share and discuss responses to the congregational inventory. Take this home for your use in the coming week, particularly in working on and perhaps adding to your response to the third question in the individual inventory.



As an Individual

- Who are the ones I readily extend hospitality toward, and in what ways?
- Who are the ones I am not so hospitable toward, and why?
- How might the gospel hospitality that Jesus evokes in Luke 14:7–14 change or transform the hospitality reflected in my responses to those previous two questions; and what steps can I begin to take now in response to Jesus’ call?



In Our Congregation

- What practices of hospitality are currently followed by your congregation, and who are the recipients of that hospitality?
- Who might be currently left out of the congregation’s hospitality and welcome; how, and why?
- How might the hospitality that Jesus evokes in Luke 14:7–14 help your congregation address the situation(s) reflected in your response to the second question?