



Spiritual Disciplines: Hospitality

Walking with Jesus

iFOLLOW

The iFollow Discipleship Series

About the iFollow Discipleship Series Pastor's Edition

Categories

The iFollow Discipleship Series is designed to be used in congregations to assist people in their pursuit of God. This assumes that individuals are in unique places in their journey and there is no perfect set of lessons that everyone must complete to become a disciple—in fact discipleship is an eternal journey. Therefore the iFollow curriculum is a menu of milestones that an individual, small group, or even an entire church can choose from. The lessons can be placed in three general categories: **Meeting with Jesus** (does not assume a commitment to Jesus Christ); **Walking with Jesus** (assumes an acceptance of Jesus Christ); and **Working with Jesus** (assumes a desire to serve Jesus Christ).

Components

Each lesson has a presenter's manuscript which can be read word for word, but will be stronger if the presenter puts it in his/her own words and uses personal illustrations. The graphic slides can be played directly from the Pastor's DVD or customized and played from a computer. There are also several group activities and discussion questions to choose from as well as printable student handouts.

Usage

The lessons are designed to be used in small groups, pastor's Bible classes, prayer meetings, seminars, retreats, training sessions, discussion groups, and some lessons may be appropriate sermon outlines.

Credits

Curriculum Development: The iFollow Discipleship Series Pastor's Edition curriculum development was lead by the **Center for Creative Ministry**. **General Editor:** Monte Sahlin; **Assistant Editor:** Debbonnaire Kovacs; **Directional Advisory:** Brad Forbes, Carole Kilcher, Ceri Myers, Cesar Gonzalez, Clayton Kinney, Curtis Rittenour, Dave Osborne, Dave VanDenburgh, Gerry Chudleigh, Jane Thayer, Jerry Thomas, John Appel, Jose Rojas, Kim Johnson, Nicole Chao, Paul Richardson, Rich DuBose, Shasta Nelson, William Sutton; **Pastoral Advisory:** Claudio Consuegra, Collette Pekar, Dave Hutman, Don Driver, Fredrick Russell, Jerry Nelson, Jesse Wilson, Leslie Bumgardner, Loren Fenton, Rebecca Brillhart; **Unit Authors:** Alberto Valenzuela, Althea Pineda, Corienne Hay, Debbonnaire Kovacs, Ed Dickerson, Gianluca Bruno, Gil Bahnsen, Greg Nelson, Jack Calkins, James Whibberding, Karen Collum, Monte Sahlin, Norma Sahlin, Pam Splawinski, Patty Ntihuka, Reinder Bruinsma, Ryan Bell; **Additional contribution** by Maria Ovando-Gibson; **Additional editing:** Dave Gemmell, Meredith Carter; **Graphic Design:** Mind Over Media; **Layout:** Paul D. Young; **Web Development:** Narrow Gate Media.

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www.ifollowdiscipleship.org

The Spiritual Discipline of Hospitality

This presentation is designed for people who have decided to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

Learning Objectives

1. Recognize and challenge preconceptions about hospitality
2. Study what the Bible teaches about hospitality
3. Broaden your concept of true hospitality
4. Experiment with creative ways to be hospitable

Content Outline

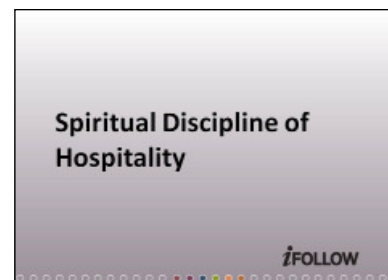
1. Introduction
2. Hospitality in the Bible
3. What is hospitality?
4. Food and hospitality
5. Communication and hospitality
6. Conclusion

Background Material for the Presenter

The beautiful ice-cream cake had to be cut. It was frozen so solidly that Jane's sharpest knife wouldn't cut through even the top layer. Her guests couldn't wait; they had a meeting to attend. What could Jane do?

She found an implement she thought would cut the cake. She cleaned it and disinfected it and, in front of her guests, she sawed the cake with a small carpenter's hand saw. Everyone had a good laugh while enjoying the desert.

Another time, Grandma made tarts for her company and placed one for each person on a plate to be handed around. She handed the plate to the bachelor sitting beside her. "Thank you very much," he said, setting the plate down in front of him. He ate all the tarts. (Stickle)



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Action Plan
& Presenter
Notes

**Spiritual
Disciplines:**
Hospitality

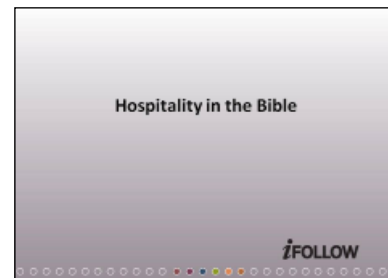
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Party stories. Everybody has some. At the time you're not sure whether to laugh or cry, but later on, they generally bring laughter. It's enough to make a person swear off hospitality forever! Have you ever wanted to be hospitable but hesitated because you just were not sure everything would turn out perfectly? Maybe the house was a mess. Or the food in your cupboard lacked one menu item. Or you couldn't think of what to have. Or you have a thousand other very legitimate-sounding reasons.

We're going to examine hospitality in this session. We want to expand our definition of hospitality and come up with some new ideas to try. We want to understand how hospitality can help the spiritual growth of both host and guests. A session such as this does not allow a complete course on all aspects of hospitality. There is a handout with a reading list which will take you as far as you wish to go into the subject. (See Handout 4.) However, what we do here today will help you to discover the unique elements of your own talents and gifts, and you will go away with the start of a plan you can implement.

Hospitality in the Bible

The ancient Jewish culture within which the Bible was written valued offering food and lodging to travelers. There were no hotels and restaurants such as we have everywhere today. If you were traveling, you had three choices. You could simply set up camp wherever you were in the evening and eat and sleep in the open. The safety of this varied rather drastically from region to region. You could ask for shelter from any house you passed, and they were very unlikely to turn you away. Again, you might or might not be safe. That's why people traveled in caravans or large groups. Your third, and by far best, choice was to have family or friends on your way wherever you were going.



If someone saw a person or family or group traveling, they were to offer them food and shelter. In Genesis 18:4, Abraham offered food to travelers passing by. In Genesis 19:7, Lot offered two angels lodging. In Judges 19:20 an old prophet offered lodging to two travelers.

The book of Hebrews reminds us that when Abraham entertained those passing strangers, he actually entertained angels. "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it." (Hebrews 13:2, NASB)

In spite of the value placed on hospitality, over the centuries many interpretations were placed on the laws of Moses to protect believers from breaking the smallest part of the law. These regulations served to separate believers from any outsider. An upstanding Jew

in the time of Christ would not have considered eating with others whom they perceived as not on their spiritual level for fear of contaminating their holiness.

When Jesus came along He made a practice of eating with “publicans and sinners.” (See Matthew 9:9-13.) Choosing to move against those aspects of His culture which were in opposition to God’s wishes for His people, Jesus opened Himself to others who were different, to those who needed what He had to offer whether that was physical healing, food, friendship or new ways of thinking.

He made it clear that He expects the same kind of compassionate hospitality from His followers. “And the king will answer and say to them, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.’” (Matthew 25:40, NASB)

We usually think of following Jesus’ example as doing what He would do—acting as He would act. And that’s true. But in this story what He actually says is that when we meet people’s needs, it is as if we have offered our service **to** Jesus Himself. We talk to God through prayer. We praise God through song. We learn about God through reading the Bible. But to give to God, we must give to our fellow human beings.

Romans 12 lists attitudes toward others that are part of hospitality and support hospitality. “Contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and curse not. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation.” (Romans 12:13-16, NASB)

You won’t see a single word in this passage about parties or cleaning house or getting a DJ. Yet this is what biblical hospitality is all about.

What is hospitality?

We all need to socialize with others. For some, the extroverts, those in families or those in a good work environment, meeting social needs comes easier. Others may experience much loneliness and some feel alone even in a crowd. Perhaps a painful situation causes them to avoid people just at the time when they need others the most. Some who struggle the most with loneliness are the shy, the elderly, the single, the ones who have lost spouses, the sick and the disabled. It is up to us, those who have chosen to follow Jesus and to try to live like Him to pay attention to these on His behalf; to offer help kindly and in a way we’d like to receive it.



The specific kind of needs the person has may vary widely. We probably think most of

emotional or social needs in the context of hospitality. These are indeed very important, and may actually be greater in a person who seems to draw back from too much contact. We must be careful to follow their lead, though. It's a tricky and delicate balance, trying not to let a person in need put us off, but trying not to be pushy, either.

Sometimes needs are more obvious. Physical needs, for instance, include a meal, clothing, gas in the car, a ride, help with the kids or a clean house when sick. Physical needs vary with the situation. And these can be the hardest needs of all to offer in a way that will help and not hurt. Our society values independence above almost everything else. No matter how you phrase it, an offer of help can sound to some people like an insult to their ability to take care of themselves. Be sure to put yourself in their shoes. Or better yet, the person who offers help with physical needs could be a person who has or used to have those same needs, and **knows** just how it feels without having to try to “walk a mile in their moccasins.” If the would-be helper has needs, too, and they can share and help each other, human dignity will be protected and the outcome may be healthier.

What about spiritual needs? People need forgiveness, love, hope and acceptance as an equal human being. One must listen to people's stories to know what their greatest spiritual needs are.

As we listen to others' stories our frame of reference shifts from our own perspective to another's perspective and finally to the relationship between us. When a person sees the degree to which his or her own view has become the only view—and that he or she has imposed that view on all of life—he or she comes to repentance. A person is at home with his or her own view. In interacting with another that frame of reference is shaken up. A person cannot be “at home” with his or her own view in exactly the same way. Instead, people reframe to include the views of another which leads to relationship. Moreover, making one's own view the most important, imposing it on all of life, can be recognized as the sin of idolatry—taking a part and making it the whole. (Oden, p. 15)

This shifting in frame of reference happens most when we invite people we don't know—someone new—into our lives. The Bible, in Luke 14:12-14, suggests inviting those of several vulnerable populations. This doesn't mean that we need to neglect our own family and friends. When creating a gathering, think about inviting someone new or maybe someone from a more vulnerable group. Avoid huddling with your favorite friends to the exclusion of those newcomers who may be standing near.

As a host makes resources available to a guest, the host participates in God's grace which gifts both host and guest. The host identifies with the guest and the guest's situation. In so identifying the host becomes a recipient of God's grace along with the guest. (Oden, p. 26.)

When should we invite others? Any time. Hospitality establishes relationships. People with needs may not state those needs to others whom they do not know. People more likely go to their friends because friends will accept them as they are. Hospitality any time

puts relationship credit in the bank. Hospitality in meeting emotional and physical needs can lead to situations in which the deeper spiritual needs get met.

When people think of hospitality, often they think of a perfectly served meal. I'd like to invite you to think more broadly. Think of hospitality as opening yourself to others through sharing whatever activities you enjoy doing. Do you like watching sports on TV? Include someone else. Do you like hiking? Sewing? Fixing cars? Baking? Could you include someone else in any of these activities? Or could you join someone else in activities and groups that are already in place?

Food and Hospitality

When people think of hospitality, they usually think food. What shall we have? Cultures around the world establish relationships by eating together.

Many books have menu plans or entertaining suggestions. The ideas can be as creative and varied as people. One lady said to another after church, "Please come to my house. We will have cornbread and we will talk." The second lady accepted the invitation expecting that cornbread would be part of a meal, but they had only cornbread. And they talked in depth. The guest declares that it was one of the best times she had ever had.

One person looks forward to a summer family picnic built around corn on the cob, yellow summer squash and tomato sandwiches. Sometimes watermelon adds variety. Hosts and hostesses create themed menus based on holidays, cultural foods, a particular object or a color. For the actual nuts and bolts of what to have, how to present it, how to deal with the unexpected or accidents and how to decorate there are excellent books for further reading. These are listed at the bottom of your handout. Nancy Van Pelt's book in particular has very good entertaining ideas.

As you plan an event, think about these questions. What do you want people to remember? Do you want them to remember you as the perfect host or hostess? Do you want them to tell everyone about the decorating, how perfectly awesome it was? Or do you want people to come away saying, "I felt comfortable there." Or, "I could open myself and know that I was accepted." Or, "I felt love when I was with those people." Or, "I felt the presence of God." True hospitality opens one's self to others while sharing whatever gifts God has given him or her.



Communication and Hospitality

Communication generally progresses in depth through several stages. People who don't know each other start with small talk and facts about each other.

Demonstration 1: Before the session, ask two participants to read the following exchanges for demonstration.

Person 1: Nice day today.

Person 2: Yes, it's nice to have some sun after the rain last week.

Person 1: Yes, it is nice. That rain washed out all my flowers. I'm going to have to replant.

Person 2: My son's in Little League. They couldn't even play last week.

Notice how the people stuck to facts. But notice something else. They quickly moved to mini-stories of their lives. "I'm going to have to replant my flowers," and "My son plays in little league." Through these small word pictures or anecdotes, both people volunteered a bit of information about themselves.

Hospitality, no matter what the setting, invites people to share mini-stories of their lives. Through those stories they share needs, joys, troubles and enthusiasm. They share themselves if those around them are alert enough to see. From there, a short leap takes people to head talk, sharing ideas and solutions to problems.

Demonstration 2: Have two people primed to read this short passage as an illustration of this point.

Person 1: When my son was in Little League, the coach made him play in all kinds of weather. I never did get the mud stains out of his uniform.

Person 2: I know what you mean. I searched until I found product X for mud stains.

Person 1: Really. Did it work?

Person 2: Like a charm. I had to order it off the Internet though. I never have found it in any stores around here.

Our demonstrators are now sharing solutions and ideas. But notice how they share them; through stories of specifics. These are still things you could share with anyone. Nothing personal has come up.

But a relationship is being established. If the people feel secure with each other, feel listened to, then they may move from head talk into heart talk.

Demonstration 3: Have two people prepared to read this short exchange as an illustration of this point.

Person 1: Too bad they can't come up with a product to clean up hurt as easily.

Person 2: Hurt?

Person 1: Yes, after my son missed a fly ball which caused his team to lose the game, the coach had him sit on the bench for the rest of the season. The miss was an accident. He tripped over his shoe lace. My son really wanted to play. Sometimes I wonder what happened to playing for the sheer joy of playing. Now my son won't even look at a baseball or a bat.

Person 2: Ouch. That must really hurt—to watch your kid lose something that he loved.

Notice the feeling level, the deepest form of communication. Also notice how Person 2 invites Person 1 to say more by picking up on the feelings and reflecting them back. "Hurt?" Not only that, but Person 2 notices two levels of hurt—the hurt the child has experienced, and the hurt the parent is experiencing. Neither of these hurts is more important than the other, but Person 2 is responding to **this** one—to the person in front of him or her.

Our demonstrations have talked about emotions and feelings. They have a much deeper perspective and insight into each other than the strangers who first greeted each other. And how did they do it? Through stories and through recognizing feelings and inviting people to say more.

Usually people do not move through the levels of communication quite this quickly. However, hospitality, bringing people into your home or similar space with you, opens the way for the communication progression.

My stories and your stories lead to greater understanding of each other. Stories about other people can be helpful and uplifting or they can descend into gossip. Gossip will destroy hospitality. If I hear a story about someone else that damages that person's reputation, I'm going to be very careful what I share lest it get twisted and told in the next gossip session.

Be careful about dominating the conversation with your own stories and opinions. People sometimes share stories that present a dilemma for them. They can often talk themselves into their own answers if given a chance, understanding and acceptance. Resist jumping in too quickly with a story or advice.

Rebecca Manley Pippert has a conversational model for drawing and enticing people into deeper conversations through questions. In her book, *Out of the Salt-shaker and into the World*, Pippert describes concentric circles of conversation. Like an onion, conversation progresses in layers.

Outer Layer—General Interest Questions: Examples of a general interest question include: Where are you from? What do you do for a living? What are you studying in college?

Next Layer—More Specific Questions: These are based on information from the first questions. Examples include: What do you like most about your job? What aspect of communications will you specialize in?

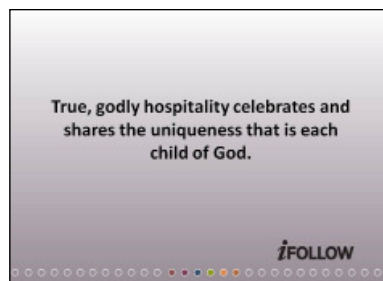
Deeper Layer—Questions About their Values: Many people miss this layer. Examples of questions of this type include: What led you to choose that major? Do you think most people in your workplace are completely satisfied with their vocations?

Inner Layer—Spiritual Questions: Depending on their answers to the questions about values and the level of relationship already developed, there may be opportunity to ask questions about spiritual topics. Some examples include: Where do you think the desire to communicate with others comes from? What do you think is the deepest desire of most people in the workplace?

Pippert also gives two additional models for communication. Each model focuses on asking questions and asking further questions rather than countering with a statement which could cause an argument. (Pippert, pp. 143-145.)

Conclusion

When we think of hospitality, we usually think of parties or gatherings, or at least opening our homes to each other. But in fact, true, godly hospitality is about opening **ourselves** to each other, sharing who we really are, what we really think, how we really feel, and listening to who the other really is, what s/he really thinks, how s/he really feels. Homes and physical resources are secondary to the main thrust of hospitality. True, godly hospitality celebrates and shares the uniqueness that is each child of God.



Handouts in this Package

1. Hospitality
2. To Give to God
3. Demonstrations (see above)
4. Recommended Books on Christian Hospitality



Additional Resources

- Homan, Daniel and Lonni Collins Pratt (2002). *Radical Hospitality: Benedict's Way of Love*. Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press.
- Mains, Karen Burton (2002). *Open Heart Open Home: The Hospitable Way to Make Others Feel Welcome & Wanted*. Downing Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press
- Newman, Elizabeth (2007). *Untamed Hospitality: Welcoming God and Other Strangers*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press.
- Oden, Amy G., ed. (2001). *And You Welcomed Me: A Sourcebook on Hospitality in Early Christianity*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press.
- Pippert, Rebecca Manley (1999). *Out of the Saltshaker & into the World: Evangelism as a Way of Life*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
- Pohl, Christine D. (1999). *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.
- Rowlison, Bruce (1981). *Creative Hospitality*. Campbell, CA: Green Leaf Press.
- Stickle, Beverly Graham (1997). *Hospitality on a Wing and a Prayer*. Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association.
- Van Pelt, Nancy (1995). *Creative Hospitality: How to turn home entertaining into a real ministry*. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association.

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**Spiritual
Disciplines:**
Hospitality

Discussion Questions

1. What was your first reaction to the word “hospitality”? Is your reaction different now?
2. Has there been a time in your life when you thought (after the fact) that you might have been entertaining angels? Has there been a time in your life when someone’s open and loving hospitality has seemed angelic to you?
3. Which type of needs—physical, emotional/social, or spiritual—have most commonly been met by hospitality in your life? Explain.
4. For many people, food is an indispensable part of hospitality. Are you, or are you not, that kind of person? Why or why not?
5. Why is communication such an integral part of true hospitality? How many parties or gatherings have you been to, where you were able to reach all four depths of conversation?
6. Share your favorite story of hospitality, as either guest or host.

Group Activity

Purpose: To broaden our concept of hospitality and to practice creative methods.

Preparation: Have writing materials and four tables. If you have too many people, you could have four sections of tables. There are several different parts to this activity. You may do them all together, but they are meant to be done at different times throughout the presentation.

Here is a creative way to divide the group. Say, “Right now I would like us to divide into groups of 4. To do this I am going to divide the room into 4 equal sections.” (Divide the room and label the sections apples, oranges, bananas, and mangos.) “Now we are going to create fruit baskets with 4 different kinds of fruit in them. I would like the apples to stand up and walk around the room picking up one of each fruit for your basket. Choose the person that you know the least from each group of fruit. Bananas, you will be the scribe for the group so my assistant will give all the bananas paper and pencil now. Apples, when you have your group, you may locate your group anywhere in the room.” Be sure each group has a Bible.

Assignment 1: (Designed to go with Section One on “What is hospitality?”) Have groups introduce themselves, saying where they are born and what their favorite color is. Then ask the groups to look up Romans 12:13-16 and list the attitudes which Paul commends. Bananas will write these down for each group. Ideas may be added from other texts. Then discuss how each of these attitudes toward people relates to hospitality. Some may wish to tell of a time when they were guests and one of the attitudes mentioned here affected them positively.

Assignment 2: (Designed to go with Section Two on “Creative Hospitality.”) Have participants fill out the “My Interests” part of Handout 1. Then ask Apples to pair with Oranges and Bananas to pair with Mangos to discuss each item on their individual lists. In which could they invite people to participate with them? Together, they can make a new list of hospitality possibilities. Then have the groups rejoin, share their lists, and choose one of the best. As a group, have them plan an event including time, place, what food to have, whom to invite. (They may invite each other if practical, plus someone new.)

Assignment 3: (Designed to go with Section Three on “Communication and Hospitality.”) Say, “In your groups, let’s practice. Start with a general question, then a specific question, a philosophical question and finally a question which leads people to think about God. Apples, please start with questions to Bananas, and Oranges, please start conversations with Mangos. I’ll give you five minutes, and then reverse so that each

person has a chance to practice. Don't worry if it feels awkward. This is just practice. We all know you'll be looking at the screen to find out what type of question is next. But with practice, the process will come easier until it flows naturally when the circumstances are right, when the Holy Spirit leads and when the conversation lends itself to this type of depth."

Debrief: Bring the whole group together to share insights, reactions, emotions, and plans for the future.

Time: Allow three minutes for getting groups together. Section one should take 10-15 minutes. Section two should take five minutes for filling out handouts, 10 for partner work, and 10 more for the group to plan their activity. Section three will need five minutes for each person, or 10 minutes total. Allow the total group 10-15 minutes for sharing at the end.

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Group
Activities

**Spiritual
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Handout 1

Hospitality

Hospitality: opening oneself and one's resources to another resulting in both host and guest receiving God's grace.

Why invite?

Attitudes

What to do?

My interests

My group's plan:

What:

When:

Where:

Food:

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HANDOUT

**Spiritual
Disciplines:**
Hospitality

Handout 2

To Give to God

We talk to God
through prayer.

We praise God
through song.

We learn about
God through
reading the Bible.

But to give to God,
we must give
to our fellow human beings.

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HANDOUT

**Spiritual
Disciplines:**
Hospitality

Handout 3

Demonstrations

Demonstration 1

Person 1: Nice day today.

Person 2: Yes, it's nice to have some sun after the rain last week.

Person 1: Yes, it is nice. That rain washed out all my flowers. I'm going to have to re-plant.

Person 2: My son's in Little League. They couldn't even play last week.

Demonstration 2

Person 1: When my son was in Little League, the coach made him play in all kinds of weather. I never did get the mud stains out of his uniform.

Person 2: I know what you mean. I searched until I found product X-mudstain.

Person 1: Really. Did it work?

Person 2: Like a charm. I had to order it off the Internet though. I never have found it in any stores around here.

Demonstration 3

Person 1: Too bad they can't come up with a product to clean up hurt as easily.

Person 2: Hurt?

Person 1: Yes, after my son missed a fly ball which caused his team to lose the game, the coach had him sit on the bench for the rest of the season. The miss was an accident. He tripped over his shoe lace. My son really wanted to play. Sometimes I wonder what happened to playing for the sheer joy of playing. Now my son won't even look at a baseball or a bat.

Person 2: Ouch. That must really hurt—to watch your kid lose something that he loved.

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HANDOUT

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Handout 4

Recommended Books on Christian Hospitality

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Mains, Karen Burton (2002). *Open Heart Open Home: The Hospitable Way to Make Others Feel Welcome & Wanted*. Downing Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press

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