

The Barnabas Letter

a newsletter from The Barnabas Center,
a nonprofit counseling, discipling,
and teaching ministry in Charlotte, NC

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Hospitality

making room for others

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About the author:

Jane Hyland is a homemaker and one who has been observed to love many with her generous hands. She is married to Bruce and they have 3 children.

Christ & the Casserole



How Hands Help Hearts

by Jane Hyland

The phone rings and a familiar voice from church asks if I would take a meal to someone who has had surgery and could use help providing food for her family. My initial reaction is "Oh this week is so busy. How can I squeeze another thing in?" But I agree to do it and start planning how to better organize the next day to work in extra food preparation.

It's not just the preparation that takes time, but delivering the meal as well, which will no doubt involve a short visit. My life is full and my own family does a good job of consuming my time. Is there a good reason to take on this extra load?

The Scripture tells us to rejoice with those who rejoice, and mourn with those who mourn (Rom. 12:15). Although this sounds like only an emotional involvement, there is the very practical side to it as well.

Whether it is celebrating or weeping, the sharing of emotions bonds us together in a deeper way. Giving practical help allows us to come face to face and touch another's heart. Whether it is an offer to watch children, run errands, offer a ride, repair something, or bring a meal, these can all be ways of entering into the joy or sorrow (or simply the personal life) of another. We are helping to bear a burden as Jesus would have us do, simply because there is a need and with no thought of reciprocation.

Just as there is a certain intimacy in sharing a meal with someone in your

home, there is something very personal about taking food prepared with your own hands for someone else to enjoy. Often in times of trauma, when nutritional meals are needed more than ever, they are the last thing thought about.

It is at those times that having a meal delivered says, "I love you. I want you to be healthy and well. Life will go on, and I'll be here to help."

Several years ago we adopted two children into our family. During the days immediately following our kids arrival, I had the joy of experiencing first-hand the wonderful support and encouragement this type of ministry affords. When the offer of having meals provided was first suggested, my initial response was to say "No thank you, we'll be fine." However, I quickly reconsidered, not knowing exactly what to expect when two energetic kids (a 7 and 8-year-old) arrived on the scene. As each evening's meal arrived, toward the end of a frazzled day, I thanked God for a church family who went out of their way to smooth this time of transition for us. And it was so much more than the food - there was the shared joy of the kids' arrival, the hugs, and the reassurances of prayer support in the days ahead.

This hands-on help can take so many different forms. My church has given out an "encouragement basket" each Sunday for several years now.

The basket, containing something fresh

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baked, is set out in a designated location each week and anyone from the congregation is free to stop by and sign the card which will be included in the basket. The basket goes occasionally to someone celebrating a special event or accomplishment, but most often it goes to someone who is struggling and hurting. This has proven to be a wonderful way to let someone know they are being thought of and prayed for. And the fresh baked "gift of the hands" is a tangible reminder of God's provision.

We live in a world of need. Surrounded by friends, neighbors or co-workers who are struggling through illness, divorce, job uncertainties, rebellious children, loneliness, and a host of other burdens, there is no lack of opportunities to reach out. And sometimes what we can do with our hands is the only way people will allow us to "speak" of our Savior.

And so we serve that friend or neighbor, being constrained by the love of Christ. Seeing the individual as someone of infinite value and loved by God, and having some measure of understanding of what God has done for us allows us to act out of the pure motive of gratitude to Him.

One day we will rejoice to hear the God of all compassion say to us, "I was hungry and you gave me something to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in. I needed clothes and you clothed me..." (Matt. 26:35-36).



"...having some measure of understanding of what God has done for us allows us to act out of the pure motive of gratitude to Him."

This article is a reprint from the Spring 2002 Barnabas Letter

RECIPE FOR HOSPITALITY

- Begin with a generous portion of God's grace- pour into host and stir.
- Add 3 - 10 parts warm food (at least 2 dishes should contain butter)
- Cut in 1 lb. of listening- if a particularly sweet time is desired- make that 2 lbs.
- Season with:
 - A dash of humor
 - A pinch of reality
 - A smidge of organization
- If host is particularly hard or raw, pour in more grace, turn up heat and stir vigorously until lumps dissolve
- Using a spoon, drip prayer across the entire assembly until it runs down the sides
- When anxiety, perfectionism, or judgementalism rise to the top- scrape off with a knife and toss into disposal
- Add people and mix together in a warm room. Bake for as long as it takes. Let sit until congealed and connected.
- Will feed more than you expected.
- Go out and serve together.

By Lisa Godman:
a counselor and teacher
at The Barnabas
Center.

A Safe Place of Rest

It all began with a friend saying, “Lisa, you have the gift of hospitality”. She had come to a weekly Bible Study in my home. So she was not basing this thought on parties or fancy gatherings, just a simple Bible Study that included dinner from time to time. I thought, “Hospitality? Me, really?”

But her question prompted a season of intentionally thinking through the gifts and calling God has placed on my life. I asked others for feedback and they agreed. “Yes, you do have the gift of hospitality”. One friend went so far as to say, “You should think of moving out of your condo (where you can barely sit 3 people at your kitchen table) to a place where you can have larger gatherings. A place for folks to linger around the table enjoying good comfort food, good wine and good conversation.”

Within days, I got a call from an acquaintance who was helping a friend find a condo to buy. They wanted to know how I liked my neighborhood. Joking, I asked if they wanted to look at mine because I had been encouraged by some friends to move. There are lots of details to the story of my new home that I would love to share but they are more about the faithfulness of God and less about hospitality. But the short story is that one thing lead to another so that within a few months God had provided a home far beyond my wildest dreams as a single woman in ministry. My new home is a place where I can have my family and friends come for an evening or a weekend. It is a daily visible reminder of an extravagant God and his faithful love for me.

“Hospitality, to me, has become more about inviting people into a safe place of rest, inviting them into a space to enjoy themselves and others.”

The thought of my ‘gift of hospitality’ has felt like a new piece of clothing that I have been told is “so me”. I liked it, but it is so

different for me that I had to get comfortable with the idea. *I wanted to have the gift of hospitality, but needed to learn how to live in it.* I have always thought of hospitality as belonging only to my friends who are fabulous cooks, have a sense of how to present the perfect meal, and who are amazingly creative...you know, a real Martha (Martha Stewart that is). I would never consider myself a Martha.

I began to realize the difference between hospitality and entertaining. Both are wonderful gifts, but slightly different. Hospitality, to me, has become more about inviting people into a safe place of rest, inviting them into a space to enjoy themselves and others. I really enjoy being at home and find great rest there. My hope is that when others are in my home for any length of time, they too will feel at home and find rest as well. Hospitality became a more comfortable ‘fit’ when I thought of it like this. It is much easier to invite others to something that I am already experiencing.

I recall the seasons of my life where I enjoyed hosting gatherings because I could hide behind the water pitcher that needed filling and the dessert tray that needed passing. I could be in the presence of others but safe behind some needed task. I remember hosting a singles group at my parent’s home after college. *Our basement would be packed with people and yet I felt so alone.* Instead of allowing my home to be the launching pad to care for others and allow them to care for me, it was a gathering place for others to connect, but not a place of connection for me. *Looking back, I see that as a time of entertaining - more out of desperation for relationship -than hospitality.*

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My desire is that when someone comes into my home for a few minutes, hours or days, it will be like a retreat away from the business of their lives. When someone stops by for a cup of coffee, dinner or spends a weekend, I want them to experience rest and refreshment. We all need places to rest and sometimes we have to take the short moments that we have.

I was talking to a friend before one of the first gatherings I had at my new home and she said, "my prayer is that you can be a guest at your own party." Oh, that was like water to my parched soul! I loved that idea and have clung to it. It is not always easy to stay engaged in a conversation when out of the corner of your eye you see the coffee pot is empty. But I have learned that the coffee is not that important and people can live without it. The really desperate coffee addicts will open a few cabinets, find the coffee and the filters and make it themselves....and I really think they are happy to do it! Rather than feeling the need to be on top of everything, I see it as a compliment that people feel 'at home' enough to rummage through the drawers to find what they need.

This mindset makes it simpler and more freeing to offer hospitality to others. It opens the door to other freedoms. For example, I very rarely make a new recipe. I usually steal ideas from friends that have already tried certain dishes. I am grateful for my friends that are a bit more adventurous in their cooking, but I usually stick to things that come recommended. This saves me the disappointment and frustration of a flopped recipe. I like to provide delicious food, but that is not where I want to expend more energy than needed. The food is not the focus of the time, it simply contributes to the spirit of the gathering.

Last summer I was hosting my first big party - an open house to celebrate my new home. I had been doing little bits all week to prepare for the party, but a few hours before the party, I began to panic. I thought "WHAT are you doing? You've

never had a party for this many people by yourself." Fear began to set in. Then I heard God whisper to me "This is about you providing a place for some really neat people in your world to connect to each other. It is not about how good the food is or how clean your house is." I believed that and moved on with my last minute preparations. I really enjoyed that evening with my friends. *I am learning the more I am at rest and focus on my guests, the more at rest others will be in my home.*

I recently came across a thought which sums up what I hope to learn about how to offer life to others:

Hospitality, therefore, means primarily the creation of a free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy. Hospitality is not to change people but to offer them a space where change can take place. It is not to bring men and women over to our side, but to offer freedom not disturbed by dividing lines. It is not to lead our neighbor into a corner where there are no alternatives left, but to open a wide spectrum of options for choice and commitment. It is not an educated intimidation with good books, good stories and good works, but the liberation of fearful hearts so that words can find roots and bear ample fruit. It is not a method of making our God and our way into the criteria of happiness, but the opening of an opportunity to others to find their God and their way. The paradox of hospitality is that it wants to create emptiness, not a fearful emptiness, but a friendly emptiness where strangers can discover themselves as created free; free to sing their own songs, speak their own languages, dance their own dances; free also to leave and follow their own vocations. Hospitality is not the subtle invitation to adopt the lifestyle of the host but the gift of a chance for the guest to find his own.

--from *Reaching Out* by Henri J. M. Nouwen

"When someone stops by for a cup of coffee, dinner or spends a weekend, my hope is that they will experience rest and refreshment. We all need places to rest and sometimes we have to take the short moments that we have."

"I really am learning the more I am at rest and focus on my guests, the more at rest others will be in my home."

*By Roger Edwards:
a counselor and teacher
at The Barnabas
Center.*

The Face of HOSPITALITY

His face; it was the first thing you noticed about Red Lutterloh. And it was the last thing you'd ever forget. Red's face was extraordinarily broad. It was warm and ruddy. But the best thing about it, the absolute best thing, was that it was always open - like the back door into a good home. It drew me in when I was 14; it draws me back to him now.

Red and his wife Mildred were in their 50's when I met them. His flaming hair had faded, but not receded. He combed it up and back. It stood in auburn waves, held in place with generous amounts of Brylcreem. His hairline formed an unbroken horizontal across his forehead, which deepened the impression of wideness. His ears, matching the proportion and color of his face, hung outward as if leaning toward you. If you caught Red's eye, a smile quickly followed, also broad and unrestrained. Without words, you got the message, "Welcome. Come on in. Tell me about yourself." Red's face shaped my perception of the countenance of God. Red had the face of hospitality.

I was introduced to Red through school friends who attended Piney Grove Methodist Church with him. They had formed a small group for teenagers and invited me to join. On Monday nights, we convened at various homes, but the Lutterloh's house was regular in the rotation. Although they had no children in the group, they made space for us. They turned on their porch lights, welcomed us at the door and gave us their living room to conduct our study and prayer. Afterwards, they reappeared with sodas, popcorn, and baked goods. We inhaled their refreshments while they took us in, listening and learning our lives.

For years, I walked into their house as if I owned the place, as if doing them a favor. "They sure benefit from us young folks," I would think. They laughed at my dumb jokes, took interest in my mediocre sports exploits and wanted to know what I thought about

God. I drew a conclusion: "My insights must be instructive, my humor refreshing!"

But although I was mistaken about who I was, I couldn't have been righter about where I was. Because they made room for me, I began to believe that God had room for me too.

Hospitality - Making Room for Others

Typical of adolescent masculinity, I took it for granted. I never really thanked the Lutterloh's. Oh, I may have offered a poor imitation of gratitude as I left some evenings - if my sister reminded me. But I didn't stop. I didn't turn and look slowly into Red's wide face. I didn't form the words that might have connected my heart to my head; "Thanks Red - for befriending me."

I wonder now if this might have hurt Red and Mildred. Perhaps they spoke of it across their pillows at night, "Does Edwards even like us?" But if they ever thought this, I never knew it. It never closed them off from me, never interrupted the welcome. I always had a place in their home. And that is the essence of hospitality: hospitality is making room for others.

What possessed Red and Mildred to let me into their house and heart? And not just me, for there were a least a dozen of us - gangly long-haired kids with torn jeans and dirty tennis shoes. They put up with our manners, methods and moods. And they endured unending renditions of 'Kum Bah Yah' and 'Pass it On' played on inexpensive guitars.

It never occurred to me to ask 'Why did you do it, Red?' Yet I know what he would say. I know, because he tried to tell us. He had a phrase that he repeated all the time. He said it when he answered the phone or opened the door, or taught in church. And sometimes, when you weren't expecting it, Red would call you by name, turn and examine you through tilted bifocals, "Edwards?" "Yeah Red?" I'd answer. He'd look at you with

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"Without words, he said, 'Welcome. Come on in. Tell me about yourself.'" Red had the face of hospitality. His face shaped my perception of the countenance of God."

eyes both amused and grave and say the sentence that was undoubtedly the theme of his life; “God loves you and I love you.”

It made me uncomfortable. I tried to defend myself. I tried my best to believe it was corny. I’d roll my eyes, with an “Oh Red,” look. I’d smile politely as if I was the one tolerating his chattering. I’d squirm and look away. But in my heart - I liked it.

At first, I thought that maybe Red’s talking about me - saying that I was special. But now I know better, he wasn’t talking about me. Yes, he was definitely saying it for me, but it wasn’t about me. My other guess was that Red just wanted us to know what he felt, so that we’d love him back. But no, Red wasn’t talking about himself either. It was bigger than that. Red said it because he knew something about God. And what he knew - transformed his home and his face into an open door.

‘God loves you and I love you.’ The phrase sounds simplistic, doesn’t it? I suppose it could be spoken merely as religious sentiment designed to reduce the world’s troubles to a feel-good sentence. But then – in view of the hurts and troubles of the world, is there anything more profound to say? What is there, in the final analysis – that is deeper than the human desire to know that God cares? Red spoke the one truth that raises hope— God loves us.

Moreover, he put a face on what we hunger for. You might find ways to express the Divine invitation that are more poetic. But you won’t find a way more powerful. The face of hospitality arouses the desire to be welcomed; it beckons us home.

Hospitality Flows from Gratitude

If hospitality is making room for others, then Red and Mildred were mansions, they were hotels. They always seemed to have space in their life. They spoke and lived with a simplicity of love that was rich and broad and immense. Their love came from God and transferred directly into hospitality.

Here’s the formula. They knew that God had made room for them - so they made room for me. “It’s only natural,” they would have said, “the one leads to the other.” Indeed. ‘We love,’ the Apostle John tells us, “because God first loved us.’ He also teaches the converse; ‘anyone who says he loves God but hates his brother is a liar’.

Here then, is the secret of hospitality: Anyone who knows God’s heart will turn it toward others. Divine love begets human love. That’s what Red was trying to tell me, ‘Since God loves, so do I.’ Hospitality doesn’t come from knowing how to fold dinner napkins. Hospitality comes from knowing God’s heart. It was the secret that Red and Mildred couldn’t keep. It was the secret that was written all over their face.

Is there room in your life for others? If not, then you must return to the room God has made for you. You must stop. You must look intently into that Great Wide Face and thank Him for befriending you. Sometimes, even forming the words can reconnect your heart. God’s love will simultaneously draw you in and send you out. It will expand you until you have room to spare. Gratitude inspires hospitality.

Pass It On

Red had enough room in his heart for me because gratitude had enlarged it. Red and Mildred were convinced that God loved me because they were convinced that God loved them. So they opened the door and handed me a coke (still in the bottle). They let me slouch on their couch, listened to me talk and then talk some more. They shook their heads and laughed. They found a way (despite my oblivious ingratitude) to enjoy me and took the risk to believe in me.

Without grumbling, they offered their hospitality. In doing so, they revealed the face of God so clearly that I can describe it to you now. It is extraordinarily broad. It is full of warmth. And best of all, it is flush with welcome, standing open - like a door into a good home. At first, it might make you uncomfortable - but give it time and it will enfold you at the same time it expands you.

Red and Mildred were hospitable because they were grateful. Sometimes they would sing with us. If I close my eyes, I can still hear their voices as they answer my question; ‘Why did you do it? Why did you make room for me?’

Holding hands, they sing a line from our favorite chorus: ‘...that’s how it is with God’s love, once you’ve experienced it. You want to sing. It’s fresh like spring. You want to pass it on’. And so they did.

“Hospitality doesn’t come from knowing how to fold dinner napkins. Hospitality comes from knowing that you have been loved. When you know that secret, thankfulness follows and generosity with it.”

“Red had enough room in his heart for me because gratitude had enlarged it. He was convinced that God loved me because he was convinced that God loved him.”

The Barnabas Center

413-B South Sharon Amity Rd.
Charlotte, NC 28211
Tel: (704) 365-4545

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Weeknights. Groups are on-going.	Barnabas Adolescent Counseling Groups- of up to 6 teens, providing a confidential place for comfort and connection. Both male and female groups (w/ female volunteer).	<i>Kevin Wimbish, Adolescent Counselor</i>
Jan-May 2006 lead	Spiritual Formation- A women's group focusing on better hearing the voice of God, and the personal invitations and affirmations of the Spirit through the study of Scripture.	<i>Lisa Godman Amy Cole</i>
Begins February 2	Honors Program Women's Group- for women in a relationship with a man who has struggled with sexual compulsivity or in a relationship that is recovering from sexual betrayal.	<i>Barnabas Staff</i>
Begins Week of Feb. 15th Bi-Weekly.	Barnabas Training Level 4: Peer Supervision- A confidential group for participants involved in caring relationships, to share situations, and gain feedback. Prerequisite: BT Level 2.	<i>Barnabas Staff</i>
May 19-21st and April 21-23 [backpacking weekend] and follow-up group.	The Quest: Men's weekend in Linville Gorge. Are you up for a challenge? This is a men's adventure weekend with a follow-up group. Come if you are hungry for a deeper relationship with God and other men. Includes adventure, backpacking, conversation, study, and reflection. For men who want to become better men.	<i>Pete Bondy</i>
May 3 2006 6:30 - 8:30PM	Healing Hearts: a group for women A biblically based, professionally led, confidential, closed group context where women can find their heart again, receive support and wrestle with the difficult realities of being harmed by emotional, physical or sexual childhood abuse.	<i>Lisa Godman</i>
June 23-25	Quest Fathers and Sons- Fathers and Adolescent sons are invited to venture together to Linville Gorge for a rugged and exciting weekend.	<i>Pete Bondy Kevin Wimbish</i>
Begins June 13	Honor's Program- A Group for Men (10 week summer term) – ministry to sexually addicted men seeking a context for pursuing healing, encouragement, and health in recovery. Please call (704-365-4545) or e-mail (info@thebarnabascenter.org) 10 min interview required.	<i>Barnabas Staff</i>
Begins June 15	Honors Program Women's Group- for women in a relationship with a man who has struggled with sexual compulsivity or in a relationship that is recovering from sexual betrayal. Please call (704-365-4545) or e-mail (info@thebarnabascenter.org) 10 min interview required.	<i>Barnabas Staff</i>
Oct 2nd, 2006	2006 Barnabas Golf Classic- Carmel Country Club. Call to reserve your spot 704-365-4545.	<i>Barnabas Staff</i>