

# MESSAGE TRANSCRIPT //

INVITE THEM IN | SUMMER ROAD TRIP

RYAN BRAMLETT | JULY 9, 2023

## Video

I'm Nathan and I serve as backstage manager of the Northwest campus. There are some technical responsibilities such as sound check, and some help with the equipment. But most of it is hospitality; it's to serve the worship team and the production team. I have everything there for them so that they can focus on being there for the congregation. So, I learn whatever needs they might have.

My wife and I moved and we started coming to Traders Point. Early on we'd sit in the back and hurry out. In 2020, when we had to switch to online, I thought I would enjoy not having the responsibility of moving to go to church. And in that time period I really started to miss church. I missed being here.

And then one morning I just had it. I signed up to serve. I went to the production section and I don't know why but I thought that that meant building things. I had my interview with Chad. He started to lay out the responsibilities of the backstage manager and I said, "You know, I think I made a mistake here. I'm probably going to be more of a problem than help."

And he said, "No, no. Just come." So I tried it. Two years have passed and it's been the best decision that I have made. You walk in and everybody is happy to see you, everybody is joyful, and encouraging, and hopeful. Even though they probably knew pretty quickly that I knew nothing about what was going on back there, they would stop what they were doing to help.

Relationships started to form. And the church that was once so big just shrunk. I'm being used in a way that I never thought I would be, but it has turned out to be so worth it.

I know the biggest barrier for people is that they want to serve in areas that they are already good at. Chances are you're probably good at a lot of things. And there is a fit for you. Getting started is the most important thing.

Ryan

Traders Point, how are we doing? It's so good to be with you. Everyone watching online and at the campuses, welcome. And before we get rolling with the new series today, I just want to take a moment and pray for our lead Pastor. Pastor Aaron mentioned last week that from now through the end of July he's going to be on study break. And study break is something that our elders gift him.



It's a time to refresh and refuel. But it's not necessarily time off. Really what he's going to be doing over these next few weeks is long-term sermon planning. So he's looking at the end of 2023 and into 2024 and asking God, "Where do You want to take us as a church?" So as he's away planning and prepping and praying himself, I just thought to take this moment and lift him up in prayer. Would you join us?

Father, we come before You today and we just lift up Pastor Aaron. And, God, I pray that over the next few weeks he's recharged and refueled. God, I pray that You would give him wisdom and discernment. God, I pray that you would lead him over the next few weeks. God, tell him where You want him to lead us in this next season. And, God, I pray that You would give him the discernment and the courage to follow through.

God, I pray that over the next few weeks, more than anything he just finds his place and his sonship, that he finds his identity in You, and that he is just overwhelmed by Your love and Your grace.

Father, we love You. It's in Your perfect and holy name that we pray. Amen. Amen.

So, I encourage you guys to continue to pray for him over the next few weeks. But then as far as today goes, we are starting a brand new series called *Summer Road Trip*. Now as I've been looking at that title... Maybe your brain has already been doing it as you walked in today. Seeing the graphics *road trip* there is probably at least one in your head that you remember. A road trip that you remember because it went really, really well or not so well. Right?

Mine is probably the latter. Okay? I remember when I was 21 years old I went on a road trip. And that could tell you most of the problems that I experienced. Three of my friends come to me and they say, "Hey, we want to invite you on this road trip but it's a little unique." And I said, "Okay. I'm all ears. Tell me about it."

And they said, "We're going to drive to Florida." That's pretty normal. Being from Indiana, we go there a lot. And we usually drive. I said, "Okay, I'm with you." They said, "Here's the thing though. We're not going to stay in a hotel." I said, "Okay. I'm intrigued." And this is the day before Airbnbs or anything like that. So that wasn't an option.

"We're not going to stay with family or friends; we're going to stay in a SUV." All of us in the same one. Me and these three other almost men. Okay? And for some reason I said yes. But here's the pitch. "We're going to be able to see so much of Florida. Every night is going to be a new city. Every day a new beach." I'm young. I'm dumb. "I'm in. Let's go."

What I did not think through was how horrible it would really be to stay in a vehicle with three other men for a week straight. I mean, it got bad. And I was uncomfortable. It was like a horrible, weird version of camping where you're sleeping outside. And even in Florida it gets cold at night. I'm all stuffy and snotty and angry and smelly. And it was like, "This is not what I had in mind."



Finally, by the end of the week, I break. I can't do it anymore. I cannot sleep in this SUV with these men another night. And at the time we're camped out in Panama City Beach in a Walmart parking lot. I got so frustrated that I just opened the door. I slammed it behind me and I start walking toward Walmart. And I have one goal. Find somewhere in there to sleep for the night.

I walk in and I just look around and it's like a message from the heavens came to me: Lawn and Garden. I was thinking, "Who's going to be looking for lawn and garden stuff in the middle of the night? Low traffic." Right? Plus there are those chairs that lay all the way back. I'll be able to lie down and get a good night's sleep.

So I go in there, find my chair, take it all the way to the back and I put it between two aisles and I lay down. I had the best night's sleep that I had had the whole trip, until I was rudely awakened by a guy who was taking his job a little too seriously. He was like screaming, "You can't sleep here." I was like, "I did." But we both agreed that I would leave before he called the cops. So that was the end of this trip.

And I just want to say, this summer road trip is going to be nothing like that one. Okay? But here's what we're going to be doing on this trip of sorts. We're going to be traveling together on this journey to really ask the question: What would it look like in this season to truly live on mission, to be the church, to intentionally be in relationships and love other people?

And each week on this road trip we're going to have some pit stops along the way. And we're going to focus in on different aspects of what it means to follow Jesus like: hospitality and discipleship and telling the story and using our gifts. And each week is going to be very practical. What does this mean for us as a church? How do we live that out here? And what does it look like to live it out in our personal circles, our lives, where we work and live as well.

Each week we're just going to ask that question. What would that look like if we lived it out? And so to kick things off today we're looking through the lens of:

## **HOSPITALITY**

Hospitality. Maybe that sounds surprising to you. Is hospitality really even in the Bible? Is that a biblical thing that we should be talking about? And it is. But I think the disconnect is that when we talk about hospitality, it's usually in a different way. Maybe when you think of hospitality you think of the perfect night, perfectly orchestrated: the fine linens, the fine china, the perfectly curated play list that's going on in the background and everything goes off without a hitch. That is hospitality. But that's not the picture that the Bible gives of hospitality. It's actually a very straight forward term that has a very specific meaning. The word that we translate as hospitality comes from a Greek compound word called:

## **Philoxenia:**

Philoxenia, Here's all that word means. It's two words pushed together. That first part, that ph—maybe you've noticed that before—is a word for love. Philadelphia—right? City of Brotherly Love. And then on the back side you have xenos, which is the Greek word for stranger. So here's the concept of hospitality. We are called to:

## **Love the stranger.**

I'm going to take the love that is usually reserved for my family, my brothers and my sisters, and I'm going to apply it to everyone, even strangers, even people that I've just met.

And what's fascinating is, maybe you've noticed this, but depending upon the translation that your Bible is in, the word *hospitality* comes up quite a bit. Look at this. In Romans, chapter 12, verse 13—this is under the heading of Marks of a True Christian:

***“When God's people are in need, be ready to help them. Always be eager to practice hospitality.”***

And then look at this in 1 Peter, chapter 4, verses 8 through 9:

*“Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.” We love that part, but look at the next verse, “Show hospitality to one another without grumbling.” (ESV)*

Oh, he just had to slide that one in there. Didn't he? Without grumbling.

Have you ever been invited to someone's house and they really didn't want you to be there? And you can tell. It's usually... Sometimes it happens when one spouse is excited that you are there and the other one is just finding out that you're coming for dinner. This is going to be great. This is awesome.

And he is like, “Hey, how was the food? Everything good?” And you are like, “Yeah. It was great. Could I have another plate? It was really good.” And they don't say it but you almost get the feeling that they are like, “No, no, no. You can have seconds. I was going to eat this for lunch tomorrow, but no, no, no. You take it now. Make sure you're nice and full. When are you leaving again?”

It's this idea to practice hospitality without grumbling. That we're eagerly wanting to open up our households to other people. And I also know... What I've come to know is that there is this very specific gender who likes to downplay or to say that hospitality really isn't my gift. And the gender I'm talking about is men. Okay?

And I will say this. If there was a competition between men and women in hospitality, who would win? Women for sure. They would win most things. And that doesn't stop us from doing the thing that we're called to do. We are commanded to do this. Here's the other thing that I will say. Men are hospital, they just have selective hospitality. They get super excited. They will tell strangers about things that they really care about. Have you met these guys?

Usually it's reserved for the back yard. If that back door opens and you step out into their paradise, they are going to tell strangers everywhere about what is going on. And it's usually two things. The grass and the grill. You're just standing back there talking, "Hey, you're probably wondering how I get my grass to look like this. I was not. And he is talking about all these ways, "If I cut like this on Tuesdays on Friday..." And I'm like, "Okay, that's nice."

But then the grill—oh, man, "You probably noticed the grill." Once again, I did not. "Let me tell you about this brisket. I've been cooking it for 96 days. Okay?" No, he's got to get all of that in there. And you're like, "Okay. No, no. That's good. Thank you for sharing." But here's the thing. When the Bible commands something—there are some of us who are better gifted at hospitality and loving the stranger—but when it's a command, we've all got to figure out what that looks like for us and how we live that out.

And hospitality is a really big deal. You know that it's even a qualification for someone to be an elder or an overseer of a church. That's how serious hospitality is. Look at this in 1 Timothy. It says:

*"The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer," elder "he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. 1 Timothy 3:1-3 (ESV)*  
*It was a sign of spiritual maturity. And here was the idea of hospitality. It was always connected to your home. It was this idea, "I'm going to open the doors to my home and I'm going to welcome in guests and strangers. I'm going to love them in this over the top way. And I'm going to wash their feet. And I'm going to prepare a meal for them. And they are going to have a warm place to stay.*

*And the mark of an elder was just that. He didn't have this secretive life where he closed off his world, but he opened his home up and he opened up everything to the people around him.*

*Where did they get this idea? Well they got it from Jesus. Jesus practiced hospitality more so than anyone and He didn't even have a house to invite people in to. He invited Himself*



*to other people's houses. And you know, hospitality is one of the things that got Jesus into so much trouble? Look at this in Luke, chapter 15. It says:*

*"Tax collectors and other notorious sinners often came to listen to Jesus teach. This made the Pharisees and teachers of religious law complain that he was associating with such sinful people—even eating with them!" Luke 15:1-2 (NLT)*

So I want to take a moment and just kind of make a distinction and kind of clarify:

### **What does it mean to love the stranger?**

I think this keeps some of us at a distance from loving the strangers around us, the people who are different than us. Because we have this idea of, "Okay, what does that mean? If I invite them over to my house, what am I saying and what am I not saying if I don't agree with someone?" Or I say, "To love a stranger, does it mean to associate with them?"

I think Jesus showed us that. To love and to be hospitable to someone, you're going to have to be in close proximity, you're going to have to rub shoulders, you're going to have to be in conversation with them. So associate? Yes.

What about accept? Accept the stranger? I think we see that here too. And that's the distinction that the Pharisees make. He not only associates but He even eats with them. And we see that it was a really big deal in the ancient Near East to sit down and share a meal with someone. It was a token of acceptance.

So what Jesus was doing with these people who were very different from Him and believed a very different thing than Him, was He was associating and accepting. But I think here's the line where everyone gets a little tense: affirm them. If I welcome someone in who is different than me, if I welcome someone in who doesn't believe what I believe does that mean that I affirm everything about them. To love them, does that mean that I have to affirm everything? And I think the easy answer is: no. We don't see that with Jesus. We see that He associates, we see that He accepts, we see that He shares meals but He always invites them into a better way.

And when you are loving a stranger, when you are inviting him into your home, do not believe the lie that to love them you have to affirm everything about them. The people in your life right now that you love the most—you don't affirm everything about them. So what it is is to create this space in our homes where we welcome in the stranger, where we see them, we hear them, we love them. And here's the only thing that I need to affirm. I don't need to affirm your politics, I don't need to affirm your beliefs, I don't need to affirm... This is what I'm going to affirm. I'm going to affirm that you are made in the



image of God and because of that you deserve dignity and love and kindness. Because of that you have a spot at my table. That's what it means to love the stranger.

And one of the ways that we're going to stay connected in this series as we kind of work through these different lenses to see our Christian mission, we're going to study through Paul's road trips in the book of Acts. So each week we're going to see Paul in a different city, working through different things. And today we're going to be in Acts, chapter 16. Acts, chapter 16, starting in verse 13.

Here's the thing. Even if you've read this before, what I want you to see today through the lens of hospitality. I want you to see that the response. People coming to believe in Jesus is over and over again through hospitality. They begin to love strangers and open up their homes to them. Take a look at this starting in verse 13. It says:

*"On the Sabbath we went a little way outside the city to a riverbank, where we thought people would be meeting for prayer, and we sat down to speak with some women who had gathered there. One of them was Lydia," And Lydia was doing very well. She was, "...a merchant of expensive purple cloth," She was a boss, "who worshiped God.*

*"As she listened to us, the Lord opened her heart, and she accepted what Paul was saying. She and her household were baptized, and she asked us to be her guests. 'If you agree that I am a true believer in the Lord,' she said, 'come and stay at my home.' And she urged us until we agreed." Acts 16:13-15 (NLT)*

I want you to think about this. There is this woman who is going down by the river. She is curious about God but she doesn't have a specific way of seeing Him. And the Paul and Silas come down to this river and they share the gospel. They tell her about Jesus and all that He has done and the relationship that He wants with her.

And, in a moment, she believes. And, in a moment, her life changes. And not only her. She gets baptized. Her whole household gets baptized. But then did you notice her response? "If this is true and if you see me as this, then come to my house and be our guest."

She immediately goes *Beauty and the Beast*. Right? "Be our guest, be our guest, put our service to the test. Tie a napkin around you neck, Cherie, and we shall do the rest." I don't know why I did that.

She opens up her home to these two men that she just met on the side of a river. And she feeds them and she welcomes them. And they stay. Do you see the connection between, "God has opened up His home to me and His heart to me, now my natural response is to open up my home to others."



And then Paul and Silas continued running the same play. They go back down to this river but the next day when they try to do this there's a demon possessed girl who is there and she begins shouting at Paul and Silas. And you see, this girl was enslaved by these guys and they were exploiting her. Part of it was this demon that allowed her to have these supernatural gifts where she could tell fortunes, tell people their future, and they were making a whole bunch of money off of her.

That is until she meets Paul. And Paul gets so frustrated with her that he turns and in a phrase, by the power of Jesus, in the name of Jesus he cast out this demon and she is healed. And you would think everyone would cheer. You would think everyone would throw a party. But they do not throw a party. It's actually the opposite.

They form a mob and word gets around and they begin to beat Paul and Silas with sticks. And they severely beat them and throw them into prison where they are sitting in the middle of the night—bruised and blood still stuck to their faces.

Imagine what you would be like in that situation. Hospitality would probably be the furthest thing from their minds. But I want you to see the place that Paul and Silas were in. It says:

*"Around midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening."* Acts 16:25 (NLT)

What? They were beaten half to death. They are in this prison, chained up but yet they are worshiping. And as I was reading this I was convicted and I want to share this conviction with you too. Because I think a lot of times when we think about hospitality, when we think about inviting people into a place where they can experience the love of God, it's always in our next season.

It's always when our circumstances change or we get a bigger house or when we graduate from high school or when I get out of college or whatever the circumstance may be. And I just want to ask: are you wishing away a season that God wants you to worship through? Because you see, our hospitality is not dependent upon a circumstance. Paul and Silas didn't wait to get out of prison before they started making even a prison cell hospitable, a place where people could experience the love of God. Did you catch that? Other prisoners were listening.

I think somebody needs to hear that today. The circumstance you're in may not be a prison cell, but God is calling you to bring hospitality to it. God is calling you to worship through it not wait for it to be over. So that lunch table, you can make it hospitable. That choir, that band, that sports team, your workplace right now...





I just want you to see this. Other people are watching. And the way that you live and the way that you love and the way that you welcome in strangers could be the thing that brings them face to face with Jesus. Look at this. Keep reading. As they are singing: *"Suddenly, there was a massive earthquake, and the prison was shaken to its foundations. All the doors immediately flew open, and the chains of every prisoner fell off! The jailer woke up to see the prison doors wide open. He assumed the prisoners had escaped, so he drew his sword to kill himself. But Paul shouted to him, 'Stop! Don't kill yourself! We are all here!'"* Acts 16:26-28 (NLT)

The jailer is going to kill himself because if the prisoners are gone, he is going to be killed. It's a high honor/shame culture and if he would have messed up here he would have been dead. So he's thinking, "I'm going to do it myself." But before he does, Paul yells out from the darkness.

I want you to think about this. Think about the jailer. There is no way in his mind if every chain has fallen, the doors are wide open, there is no way that those people are still waiting in there when they could leave. But Paul is. And we see that his hospitality had not run its course yet. He still had more work to do with God. And look at the jailer's response:

*"The jailer called for lights and ran to the dungeon and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. Then he brought them out and asked, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' They replied, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, along with everyone in your household.'*

*"And they shared the word of the Lord with him and with all who lived in his household. Even at that hour of the night, the jailer cared for them and washed their wounds. Then he and everyone in his household were immediately baptized. He brought them into his house and set a meal before them, and he and his entire household rejoiced because they all believed in God."* Acts 16:29-34 (NLT)

I want you to think about this again. This jailer, middle of the night, is not thinking in a million years that this earthquake is going to come. He's not thinking in a million years that this regular, ordinary job is going to lead to the life-changing gospel. But in a moment, through their hospitality, even when they were on the other side in prison, they were able to reach this man with the love of God.

And he responds. He gets baptized. His whole household is baptized. And did you notice his response? It's the same as Lydia's. He opened up his home for them. And as he was spiritually washed, he was baptized, what does he do? He begins to physically wash the wounds of these people that he just met.

And then he calls and he opens up a dinner for them. In the middle of the night he prepares a feast for them—extending his hospitality to them because he’s received the love of God. Now he can’t help but share it with other people.

Do you see this? Hospitality is the natural response to a supernatural act of love from God. And I just want to close with one thing. It brings it all full circle in verse 40. It says: *“When Paul and Silas left the prison, they returned to the home of Lydia. There they met with the believers,”* so now it’s growing, word got out: healing, prison, earthquakes, everything that is going on. People want to know about this gospel. They want to know about this kind of love. “

*There they met with the believers and encouraged them once more. Then they left town.”*  
Acts 16:40 (NLT)

I love to think about this. Lydia’s house, which just became a thing to the Christian world because she invites in Paul and Silas and prepares food for them and lets them stay, now, very quickly... A lot of people believe that her house became the first church in the city. And not only is she there, and the people of her household, now this jailer and his household.

And it doesn’t say specifically, but I like to think that the demon possessed girl who has now been freed from a demon, her life is completely shifted and she has nowhere to go, she shows up to the doorstep of this house and, as a stranger, she is welcomed in with the love of God.

And these people who should have no reason to be together are meeting together in this house. Think about how beautiful that is. That’s a picture of the church. When we take the hospitality of God and we apply it to our lives, it brings the most unexpected characters into the family of God. So what do we do with that? Here’s the thing:

## **LET GOD USE YOUR HOME**

I think we may be in a season right now for one reason or another where, for you, your house has become, like a lot of things, a safe haven for you. It’s become a retreat for you. You go out into the world, you do those things, and then you come back and your house is yours. The garage door closes before you have a conversation with anyone around you. Or you walk through your apartment door and you go straight to your place and shut the door and you don’t even know the neighbors around you.

What I would challenge you with in this season is this. What would it look like to practice hospitality and let God use your house to welcome in the stranger, to welcome in the people who you’ve been meaning to meet and get to know for a long time now? And



what do you do? Don't over complicate it. I love the way author Rosaria Butterfield talks about hospitality. She says:

"Radically ordinary hospitality is this: using your Christian home in a daily way that seeks to make strangers neighbors, and neighbors family of God."

What would that look like? To be able to just invite people into your house. They don't have to look like you. They don't have to act like you. They don't have to vote like you. They don't have to be Christian like you. "I'm going to welcome them in." For most people, you would change their lives—to be seen, heard, and loved. And that is something all of us can do no matter the space that we have.

What do we talk about? And here's the thing. Don't over complicate it. You are not a counselor, a social worker, or a spiritual mentor. This is not a project that you are working on. This is a person you are getting ready to know and love. Here's one question that will give you the whole night to talk about:

**Would you be up for telling me your story?**

Tell me how you grew up. Tell me what you like to do. Tell me how you got here. Tell me how you ended up next door to me. Rosaria Butterfield also has another line where she said this:

"God never gets the address wrong."

I want you to think about that. What if the person that you share a wall with or share a yard with, what if it's not just happenstance? What if God has a plan for you to reach the people around you? What if God didn't get the address wrong? And what if your hospitality is going to be the thing that brings them face to face with Jesus?

I want to give you a prayer, a prayer that you can pray starting today. But, I'm telling you it's one of those ones... Have you heard about these? These are the prayers that God answers. You can be sure of that. And here's the prayer. If you're ready and you're bold enough to pray it.

Father, how can I use the house you've given me to love the strangers you've sent me? God didn't get that address wrong. What would it look like for me and you to bring the hospitality of Jesus to those around us? And here's the core of what hospitality really is. If we would begin to look at the spaces we have, whether that's an apartment or a house, it is a gift from God. Everything that you have. And that means that it's not ours but it was given to us as a gift and God has some very specific ways in which He wants us to use it.

What if we could begin to see this as a good thing that is not just meant for us but for us to share with the world, to share with strangers? We could open up our doors and open up our tables or create space around a fire pit where people can be known, seen, and loved. Then we realize that the good things that we have are best when we get to share them with others.

You know, I have a bunch of kids. And I talk about this a lot. There are so many of them. Right? I have four kids: Campbell, Reese, Veda, and Holland. And there is something unique about every single one of them.

But I tell you what really warms me when I think about Veda is just the way that she sees the world. For example, I could leave right after this. I could go pick her up from Kids' Ministry—just me and her. And I could say, "Hey, babe. What do you say we hop in the truck and we go to Starbucks and I get you a cake pop?"

She would lose her mind. She would be so excited to go and to get a cake pop. But here's what I know about Veda. Before we get to Starbucks, she would say, "Dad, do you think we could get one for Campbell and Reese too?"

If I could try to capture what hospitality is—that's the Jesus' version of hospitality. When God gives us something good to say, "Hey, Do you think I could share this with them?" Then everything begins to come together.

What would it look like to let God use your home? And then here's the second one:  
**LET GOD USE YOU AT HIS HOUSE**

And that's what these cards are all about. As you walked in today, God's house, we're talking about this church, what would it look like to let God use you in this space, to join a serving team? And this paper is pretty simple. It's just your name, information, and then there are a handful of serving options on the bottom. Those are unique to you. And we could have a conversation about what that would look like.

But here's the thing that I want to put in front of you and be very clear about. No matter where you serve or how you serve, hospitality is at the root of it. Whether you serve in Kids' Ministry, in Youth Ministry, Guest Experience, Worship—you do a thing but thing underneath the thing is hospitality.

Here's the truth. People flood through our campuses every single Sunday. Strangers. People who don't know God. And people that it took so much courage to walk through the door. I remember being one of those people wondering every step, "Am I going to be... Is anybody going to associate with me? Is anybody going to accept me when I walk through these doors? Does anybody want me to be here?"



And when we serve, we get to answer those questions—yes. We get to love people and see them and hear them and to serve them in really unique ways, in ways that they remember, ways that they go from here without a shadow of a doubt knowing that it's not only God who loves them, it's a church that loves them and has their back and wants what is best for them.

I also know that there are some people, maybe you've been serving for a little while now and you're starting to wonder, "Does it really matter what I do? And you started to reduce it to, "I just do this." Or, "I just stand by this door." "I just lead this group." Or, "I just stand."

Any serving position can be as big or small as you make it. And I can tell you any role in the church is not made to be small or meant for you to stay small or to fit in or for you to just show up. It is to be fully present and to love the person on the other side of you. I want to challenge you with this. It's the concept of:

### **Unreasonable Hospitality**

Unreasonable hospitality. I came into contact with this phrase a couple of months ago from a guy named Will. He wrote a book with the same title. He's coined this phrase. And Will oversaw a fine dining restaurant in New York City. It's one of the best restaurants in the country.

Will talks about this transformation that happened at their restaurant where they went from a good, fine dining restaurant to the number one restaurant in the world. Not in New York City, not in the country, but in the world. And the way that they got to that number one spot is not how you may think.

It wasn't just because they had amazing food. Everyone can have amazing food. The difference maker was their hospitality, loving the stranger, loving people who were just coming in off of the street in really unique ways. In ways that they received it. It meant something to them.

It all started one night when he was walking around and he was working the front of the house and he was going from table to table checking on people. And he hears this conversation happening by one table. It's a group of foodies. And they flew into New York City. One thing that they were doing was eating as much good food as they possibly could. And they had their list of all of the top restaurants.

Will's restaurant was their last restaurant. And they talked about how amazing it had been and how they couldn't believe that they got to eat so much good food. But the one thing that they didn't get to try while they were in New York City were the street hot



dogs. A hot dog from a vendor. A little, cheap two dollar hot dog sitting in hot dog water. They were talking about it, “The only thing we missed.”

He hears this conversation happening. Doesn’t even mention it. Walks to the back to the kitchen. Busts through the door. Runs out the back. Runs down to the corner to the nearest hot dog vendor and gets a couple of hot dogs. He brings them back to the kitchen, takes them to the chef, one of the best chefs in the world. And he said, “Hey, I need you to plate these.” He says, “Absolutely not.”

He explains to him the situation that is going on and he reluctantly agrees. He chops up these hot dogs in really fine pieces and sets them up beautifully on a plate with a little dash of ketchup and mustard and relish. And then he brings this out to this table, unexpectedly. They had no idea what was about to come. And he sits down at the table and says, “Hey, I just want to make sure that all of your dreams come true on your trip to New York City. Here is a street hot dog.

The table loses their minds. He said, “I’ve given expensive champagne on the house. I’ve given caviar. I’ve done it all.” (Obviously I eat a lot of caviar). “Nothing brought that kind of a response—a two dollar hot dog.”

So, once again, hospitality is not about perfect. It’s not about over the top. It’s not about expensive. It’s about seeing people, hearing them, and loving them.

So what I want to ask you, in this next season, as you join a serving team or as you continue in this next season of serving, how would your role look differently if you practiced hospitality? Unreasonable, extra-ordinary hospitality here at this church where people came in and you didn’t just do the thing, but you saw them and you connected with them and you loved them and you truly made this feel like a home for them? What could that look like in your different worlds?

And the challenge is to fill this out. Fill it out before you leave and at every campus in the lobby we have these banners *Join The Team*. And our team would love to meet you, have a conversation, talk about... Answer any questions you might be holding on to. What does it look like to serve? Any of that. We have people who would love to have that conversation with you. Please don’t leave here without talking with someone.

And I also know that there are some people in the room today, this is new to you. The idea of welcoming people into your home, the idea of not only communicating with strangers or letting them come into your house or preparing a meal for them, serving them in over the top ways that don’t even make any sense, doesn’t compute. The kind of hospitality that I’m talking about only makes sense in light of the gospel.



We will never come to this place of fully offering ourselves our homes and everything to love a stranger until we come face to face with the gospel. And if you are here for the first time, I want you to hear this. This is the Good News and it's all centered around Jesus and the hospitality He practiced with me and you.

Here's what we believe. You are made in the image of God. God made you. But sin has corrupted this world and has distorted things and has distanced you from Him. And Jesus was not okay with that. God was not okay with that.

So He sent His only Son here to live the life that we couldn't live, the perfect life. And then He went to a cross for me and you. And He died the death that you and I deserve. But He overcame. He defeated death. And He defeated sin to create a space where now you and I, broken flawed sinners, can be welcomed into the family of God. No longer strangers but family to God.

This is what Jesus offers. Jesus was the ultimate host. You look back at His teachings and the way that He did things, He came to seek and to save the lost, the strangers, the foreigners—the ones who were on the outside.

How did He do it? He came eating and drinking. Is that not a plan that you can get behind? Doesn't that sound like the best life ever? Sitting around a table or a fire and watching people move from strangers to family. This is the call that has been put on all of our lives. And this is the response that we have.

God would become homeless, leave heaven so that you and I could have an eternal home. That God would come and serve humanity. God would wash their feet. God would turn to us and say, "Hey, I'm going," where? "To prepare a house and a room for you." Jesus is the ultimate, ultimate example of hospitality. So what do we do? We respond. Our response is the same as the jailer, do you remember? "What do I do?"

*"Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved." Acts 16:31 (NLT)*

At every campus we're going to have people at the front of the stage who would love to meet with you, pray with you, talk about what it looks like to receive the hospitality of God, to receive His love, and to move today from a stranger to the family of God. And for all of us, followers of Jesus, what we're going to do to close things out today is finish by taking communion. As I was studying this week there was a commentator that I was reading and he drew this correlation between the sacraments and hospitality. The sacraments. Do you know what we are talking about? We're talking about baptism, we're talking about communion, but what are they really? Just water, wine or juice, and bread. They are just normal things until you dedicate them to the Lord. And then everything changes.





So as we take communion today, I want you to think about the hospitality of Jesus, what it took for Him to welcome you into His home and what He is convicting you of and calling you to in this season. And to make that connection—what would my house look like if I dedicated it to the Lord?

So if you would, go ahead and open this up and take the bread, which represents the body of Jesus that was broken on our behalf. Through that breaking He has welcomed us in, invited us in to a relationship with Him. And remember.

Take the juice, which represents the blood of Jesus given for me and you. And now through that sacrifice, we are sons and daughters, children of the most high God. Chosen, trusted to be ambassadors, trusted to open up our homes and welcome people in just as we have been welcomed in. So, as you take the juice, remember the sacrifice that was made for you.

What I would ask now is that everyone at all of our campuses would just stand to your feet. We're going to close in worship. But I just want to encourage you (this is the first stop on our summer road trip) to really wrestle with what it would like in this season to practice biblical hospitality. Would you pray with us?

Father, we can only begin to comprehend this kind of hospitality, the kind of hospitality that is just over the top, the kind of hospitality that would move You from heaven to earth and that You would go to a cross. You would remove every single barrier so that we could come to know You.

God, in Your Spirit, God, I pray that You can show us what it would look like to let You use our homes. And, God, what would it look like for You to use us in Your house, Your church? What would it look like to practice unreasonable hospitality? What would it look like to get to see people move from strangers to family? What would it look like to truly see, hear, and love people? God, help us to do that.

God, take away any of our fears. Take away any of the lies that we're not just that good enough people. We don't have the space. God, don't let us wish away another day or season believing that it will just be when the right circumstances come in. But, God, Your hospitality is bigger. Your love is bigger. God, You can bridge together anything. God, help us to be mindful and to truly see and to love those around us. God, help us to be known by Your love and Your hospitality.

And, Father, we believe that through obedience to You and by the power of Your Spirit we will see revival. We will see this city come to know You. We will see this world, one by one, come to know You. And let this be that place where strangers become family. Father, we love You. It's in Your perfect and holy name we pray. Amen.

