

PRACTICE GUIDE

JOURNEYING IN THE WILDERNESS

TERRI MARTINSON ELTON

BEING HOSTED



I would rather host than be a guest. As a planner with the gift of hospitality, I love preparing for events, mingling and hearing other people's stories, and knowing people had a good time. I am wired to be a host. Being a host is comfortable. Hosts choose the food, decide the time, and create the atmosphere. **Being a guest is vulnerable.** I recently had dinner at a new friend's house. It was his Sabbath meal, a meal with special meaning, and I was honored to be invited. And I panicked, unsure how to be a good guest. What do I wear? Do I bring wine or flowers? What is the appropriate time to arrive? Given my diet, will I be able to eat the food?

Over the years, I have discovered patterns of hospitality and practiced being hosted. In the Dominican Republic, I learned to navigate different cultural norms. As a guest in other faith communities, I appreciated the guides who accompanied me. When I volunteered at a school, the children's smiles and staff conversations made me feel welcomed. **Embracing the role of guest requires pushing aside expectations, trying new things, and trusting others. It demands we show up emotionally as well as physically.** It forces us to discern when to make our needs known and when to go with the flow. Being a good guest involves being curious, generous, and humble.

“

Embracing
the role of
guest
requires
pushing aside
expectations,
trying new
things, and
trusting
others.

*Journeying in the
Wilderness, 109*



Hospitality is a prominent theme in Scripture. Welcoming the stranger is an Old Testament mandate. It was one way the Israelites remembered their time enslaved in Egypt and how they cared for travelers. Jesus relied on being hosted all of his adult life and frequently taught about hospitality. Jesus accepted the gift of an unexpected guest at dinner (Luke 7:36–50) and was served by a Samaritan woman at a well (John 4:1–42), Jesus talked about the importance of being present with Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38–42) and demonstrated that he operated with a theology of abundance in feeding five thousand people (Luke 9:10–17). **Receiving and giving hospitality are spiritual practices for followers of Jesus.**

Being a guest is risky; it means living with hands open to the world. Living that way is hard, at least for me. My friend Dawn expanded my imagination about living with such a posture. As an actress, she worked in various locations around the country; for four full years, she leaned into the practice of being hosted. Dawn decided to let go of her lease, placed her belongings in storage, and relied on the hospitality of others. Based out of New York, she used her network to let people know she was looking for short-term places to stay. And guess what? People opened their homes to her. As time went on, she expanded her network and new opportunities presented themselves. As she told me about her experiment, I became anxious. I had a need for the security (imagined or real) of a stable address. Without a long-term plan, I became uneasy. Yet this posture of living with our hands open to the world is exactly what Jesus is inviting us to embrace. Through conversations with my friend, I was challenged to rethink what being hosted really means.

Lydia Place is a ministry which is teaching me what it means to be hosted. As a missional community in St. Paul, Minnesota, the people of Lydia Place are committed to being in and for their neighborhood, living with hands open. As they discern how to be present within existing structures and activities, they are continually asking, **“What is God up to?”** and **“Where are we being invited to join?”** This ministry began as the pastor walked the neighborhood and created relationships with business owners and area leaders. It matured as relationships deepened and expanded. Today, they worship weekly in an art gallery and lead a communion worship at an



apartment complex. But worship is not the center of this ministry. Equally important is their participation in the neighborhood council and working toward food sustainability. Lydia Place has grounded its ministry in a theology of dwelling in the neighborhood with the practice of being hosted.

What if the church is being called to embrace the role of guest?

Embracing this role means living with hands open to the world—vulnerable, curious, and humble. Vulnerability entails being a part of the greater community and speaking their language. Curiosity involves eating different food and gathering in new ways. Humility means setting aside assumptions and listening more than speaking. Being hosted focuses on our neighbor. It involves trusting strangers and rethinking presuppositions. God's table is one place to exercise this posture, as all are guests at God's table.

The next time you gather for communion, participate with the mentality of a guest. *How does that impact your experience?* God's mission operates in the same way. We are invited to join God in loving the world. Good hospitality, as both host and the one hosted, creates an environment where relationships are formed and love can grow. God, in God's infinite wisdom, has chosen to be revealed in communities of hospitality, as we encounter our neighbor on the street and gather around bread and wine.

“

Being hosted focuses on our neighbor. It involves trusting strangers and rethinking presuppositions.

*Journeying in the
Wilderness, 112*