

Semicontinuous

Jer. 2:4–13

Ps. 81:1, 10–16

Complementary

Sir. 10:12–18

Ps. 112

Heb. 13:1–8, 15–16

Luke 14:1, 7–14

A Hospitable Life

**Goal for
the Session**

Youth will describe characteristics of hospitality and identify ways their expression of Christian hospitality might grow.

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on Hebrews 13:1–8, 15–16

WHAT is important to know?

—From “Exegetical Perspective” by David R. Adams

Hospitality (v. 2) is one way, obviously enough, in which this love becomes concrete. The author strengthens the injunction that hospitality not be neglected by grounding it in biblical precedent: in providing for strangers “some” have entertained angels (divine emissaries) unknowingly. The allusion is presumably to Abraham and Sarah, who entertained three “men” who turned out to have supernatural qualities (Gen. 18:1–15), though Lot, Gideon, and Manoah may also be in view (Gen. 19:1–14; Judg. 6:11–24 and 13:3–23). How does this precedent function? It seems to promise more encounters of this kind and perhaps to warn that their significance is easily overlooked.

WHERE is God in these words?

—From “Theological Perspective” by Gray Temple

Suppose your congregation, or any other, were to face into and lay claim to the energies with which we have voiced contentious discontent, asking God’s forgiveness only for its target, not for its voltage and amperage? Suppose we were to direct that same energy into passionately adoring Jesus Christ in church? Suppose we applied the judgment that formerly shaped our gossip into appreciating the excellence of potential friends in the congregation? Suppose those energies made us brave in the face of the world’s many needs? Just imagine it. There would be no institution quite like *that* church anywhere in the world—not even in America.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

—From “Pastoral Perspective” by Lanny Peters

The writer goes on to mention another unlikely place to entertain angels without knowing it (echoing Jesus’ words in Matthew 25), with those in prison. It is a challenging word to remember those in prison, “as though you were in prison with them,” and even more demanding to remember “those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured.” If we took this passage seriously, we would all be joining organizations that would help us identify in an empathic way with victims of torture, whether in Guantánamo Bay or Beijing. The pastoral word may have to be a prophetic word today.

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

—From “Homiletical Perspective” by Frederick Borsch

Being able to offer hospitality to strangers comes from a new kind of reaching out in love. This is empathetic love that also enables one to put oneself in the shoes of those in prison and to *feel in one’s own body* what it is like for another to be tortured (v. 3). Today, when torture can be rationalized and nearly two million American brothers and sisters are shut away in our grim penal system, one realizes painfully what an adventure of love it is to try to participate fully in the good life—to participate in eternal life and to act as the Good Samaritan and Jesus did.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

*Hebrews 13:1–8,
15–16*

Focus on Your Teaching

Youth who tend to be self-focused often ignore the suffering and situation of others. Our media culture sends the message to young people that the things that matter are alleviation of personal discomfort and fulfillment of personal ambition. While teenagers agonize over acne and crooked teeth, other people languish in prison, some suffer torture at their captors' hands, and still others starve for lack of food. As youth develop a broader vision of the world, and see that they are not its center, a welcoming hospitality can take shape in their lives. Employ your group's setting as a hospitality laboratory, practicing welcome and openness to all who enter.

*God, increase my faith. Open my eyes to your power at work around me.
Amen.*

YOU WILL NEED

- party decorations, refreshments
- upbeat music, media player
- newsprint, marker
- Bibles
- copies of Resource Sheet 1
- pencils

For Responding

- option 3: copies of Resource Sheet 2

For Film Connection

- Internet-connected device

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, decorate the room for a surprise party. Prepare refreshments that are different from anything you normally might have. Post a sheet of newsprint on which you have drawn a chart with three categories: About God, About Outsiders, and About Insiders. For option 1 in Responding, locate people and resources to help identify ways the youth could be involved in prison ministry.

As the youth arrive, play upbeat music. Enlist two or three youth to greet others enthusiastically. Act more hospitable than normal. When most of the youth have arrived, ask:

- ✪ How did you feel about the welcome?
- ✪ When have you felt comfortable as a newcomer or a visitor in a strange situation? What made you feel welcomed?
- ✪ When have you been welcomed into somebody's home and made to feel at ease? How did the hosts do this?
- ✪ When has a group to which you belonged excluded someone from membership because he or she was different? How did you feel about this action?

Tell the group that today's lesson is about hospitality, offering God's love to others, friends and people unknown to us. Pray:

Dear God, give us new vision this day, so that we might see the life you have in mind for us. Help us believe. Help us trust. Help us live. Through Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

EXPLORING

Discuss what it's like to be an insider. Invite the youth to name groups or experiences in which they feel like insiders. Discuss:

- ✪ How are you treated by others in the group?
- ✪ What "secret" information about the group have you been given?
- ✪ What did you have to do to prove your worthiness to be an insider?

Consider what it's like to be an alien, an outsider, or different. Together, list on newsprint examples of who would be considered an outsider in each of the following: a) their school; b) your community; c) your nation. Keep these lists for option 2 in Responding.

Ask youth to think about any time when they were an alien or an outsider. Ask:

- ✪ What was the circumstance?
- ✪ Who, if anyone, welcomed you or helped you?
- ✪ What would have improved the situation you experienced?

Point to the newsprint with three categories (God, Outsiders, Insiders). Ask a volunteer to read aloud Hebrews 13:1–8, 15–16. Have someone write the responses in the corresponding category on the newsprint, as the group discusses:

- ✪ What does this passage tell us about God's view of hospitality?
- ✪ What does this passage tell us about people outside the church?
- ✪ What does this passage tell us about followers of Jesus? What does God expect of insiders?

Read aloud Hebrews 13:2. Wonder together what "entertaining angels unaware" might mean. Comment that some Bible scholars believe this is a reference to Genesis 18. Ask volunteers to read Genesis 18:1–15 as a readers' theater. You need voices for Abraham, Sarah, one visitor, and a narrator. After the reading, ask another youth to read aloud Hebrews 13:2–8. Ask:

- ✪ Who are these strangers?
- ✪ Why was Abraham so hospitable?
- ✪ How would you have responded if you had been Abraham?
- ✪ Compare Genesis 18 and Hebrews 13. Who are the unexpected "angels" according to Hebrews 13? What blessings might be received by welcoming them into our lives?

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Hospitality in Hebrews). Participants may work in pairs or individually as they follow the directions on the resource sheet. With the entire group, discuss and compare the words and examples.

To conclude this discussion, explain that the Bible uses a Greek word to talk about how insiders are to welcome outsiders: *philoxenia*, or love for the stranger. Hospitality in the name of Christ welcomes outsiders and embraces them with the love of God in practical ways. Ask:

- ✪ What steps can you take to develop *philoxenia*?
- ✪ Which hospitality characteristic do you show most often?

EASY
PREP

✿ Which hospitality characteristic would you most like to develop?

RESPONDING

Choose one of the following learning activities:

- 1. Prison Ministry** Participants will explore opportunities for ministry with people in prison. Ask your pastor or an informed church member about where to find resources about the work of organizations that provide spiritual and emotional support and financial assistance to people in prison. Brainstorm ways your group can extend hospitality to those imprisoned and plan to implement a form of service to them.
- 2. Reaching Out** Participants will apply what they have learned from Hebrews 13. Display the lists that the group made in Exploring. Together brainstorm specific things the group might do to show the love of God to those on the lists. With the community and national lists, consider what your congregation might do. Make an action proposal and decide how you might present it to the congregation's leadership.
- 3. Become an Angel Unaware** Youth will have an opportunity to become an "angel unaware" to someone. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (Becoming an Angel Unaware). Invite youth to write the name of a friend who is facing a difficult, even impossible, situation. When the resource sheet is complete, suggest that youth place it where they will see it frequently in the coming week. When the situation is resolved, ask youth to write on the sheet how it was resolved and the date. Suggest they keep the sheet as a reminder of this unusual story and of how they can be angels to others.

CLOSING

Invite the group to name ways they will seek to be God's faithful people in the week ahead.

Pray:

*O God, you surprise us daily by caring for people we might overlook.
Help us realize that in your holy kingdom we were the outsiders and you
brought us in. Let us do likewise so that others may learn from us what it
means to live in Jesus' name. Amen!*

■ ENHANCEMENT

FILM CONNECTION

In this scene from *Les Misérables* (2012, PG-13), a bishop and his sister welcome a known convict, Valjean, into their home. View "Trust Each Other" at www.wingclips.com/movie-clips/les-miserables/trust-each-other. Discuss:

- ✿ What similarities do you see between the Hebrews 13 passage and the characters' behavior in the scene?
- ✿ Who in your experience best exemplifies the bishop's actions?

Hospitality in Hebrews

Read the advice Hebrews 13 offers concerning hospitality—practical ways of welcoming others with the love of Christ, of serving others in ways that are pleasing to God. Restate the advice in language that your friends at school would understand. Give one example of each characteristic.

Advice about Hospitality	Restated in Contemporary Language	My Example
Hebrews 13:1		
Hebrews 13:2		
Hebrews 13:3		
Hebrews 13:4		
Hebrews 13:5		
Hebrews 13:7		
Hebrews 13:15		
Hebrews 13:16		

Becoming an Angel Unaware



Write the name of a friend who is facing a difficult, even impossible, situation. If you prefer, write initials instead of a name.



Think about the name you have written. What emotions does this person seem to be expressing about this situation?



How might God work through you to help this friend?
Examples include giving encouragement, praying daily for the person, praying with the person, or talking to a trusted adult to get help for him or her.