



Be Our Guest – Part 2

Pastor Ted Cunningham

Today we're considering the kickoff for summer, and we're actually finishing up a two-part message. It's not really a series; it was just a sermon that got away from me. So, we broke it into two parts called *Be Our Guest*. This is going to be very practical, but we are preparing ourselves for our guests that will be here... Obviously, they are here today, but they are going to be here all summer, all throughout the year, And as a church, we're taking serving and hospitality seriously. We want every person who shows up on this campus... And we want all of us, as we go out into this community, that when people leave this campus or leave your presence, they would know they matter to God, and they matter to us.

We looked at this quote last week, but serving is getting the right meal to the right person at the right time. Hospitality is how they feel about that in the process. Amy and I were at lunch here in Branson on Friday. We had a great server. As the meal was brought to our table, another server walked up behind him and pointed to me and said, "That's the pastor I was talking about." Now hold it. In Branson, that can go a couple of different ways. I hope she's here today because I thought this was fantastic. She said, "Got up last Sunday and I didn't want to go to work." She had a shift that was going to be long. She goes, "I did not want to be at work, and I most definitely did not feel like going to church." She said, "I got up and I went to church, and I had no idea it was all going to be about hospitality. It changed my attitude. I headed to work that day."

I didn't get no free dessert out of it, but I wasn't expecting it. I've been getting stories and emails and direct messages from people who had some great interactions. I'll close the message with one of them today.

As we talk about our guests coming on to this campus. We hope many of you will go, "That's exactly what we experienced." We're kind of seeing this as like a training time with *Be Our Guest*. One study done showed the percentage of people and how they hear about church and why they come to church. How do people start attending church? Two percent is based on advertising. That's why we do none. You're never going to see a billboard; we just don't do it. It doesn't have a high impact.

Six percent is by organized visitation. Raise your hand if your church had organized visitation. We did. We went door knocking. It was called soul winning. We would go out Saturday morning. This is a true story. We would knock on a door. Someone would open the door in their robe like they just woke up and we would start with this subtle question – If you were to die today, would you go to heaven or hell?"

“Let me get a cup of coffee. I have to think about that for a second.” I’m not judging; I’m just saying maybe start with, “Hi, I am What’s your name?” About six percent come to church based on organized visitation.

Six percent invited by the pastor. So that’s off my shoulders too because I’ve got to tell you something. Cold calling people has never really worked for me. A wife will come up to me and say, “Will you call my husband? If I get him to church... I don’t know why he won’t come to church.” I’m like, “Listen... I’m going to call your husband, and this is how the conversation is going to go, ‘Hey, this is Ted. I wanted to invite you to church.’” It doesn’t really go anywhere. I’ve never been all that effective at that.

Eighty-six percent of people attend church because they are invited by a friend. Why is that important? We think about our guests, but we also think about the friends who are inviting them. It may be right now that some of you invited someone to church and it’s their first time here and you’re sitting there so nervous on the drive in. You’re thinking, *Please don’t let that one overactive person come up to my friend and go in for the hug. My friend hates hugs. I don’t want my friend to get a hug. Let it be casual.* There are a lot of people here that want to just kind of sneak in.

So, as we talk about that today, we’re talking about how we care for our guests and the friends who invite them. We are going to see two similar stories today. I love this text in Matthew 9: 9-13. We get the heart of Jesus for the sinner. Again, often when we read scripture, we put ourselves in the stories and all of us in these stories today need to put ourselves in as the sinner because we were the ones Jesus came after.

9 As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector’s booth.

When we talk tax collector today, don’t think IRS agent – it’s a little different. In that day, there would be a booth set up on the side of the highway and they would collect tax on any merchandise traveling that way. A could say a lot of things about tax collectors. One, they were thieves because they would take more tax than required and the difference they would pocket, so they were thieves, but also, they were considered by the Jews to be traders because they were collecting tax for Rome.

Since we don’t have tax collecting booths, I was trying to think of it this week. What do we avoid. At the mall, a lot of us will try to avoid the kiosk. We won’t make eye contact. We walk as far away as possible to get away from that person. I always think... For those of you who work in a kiosk, the thick skin you must have to face that rejection all day long. And what we see in this story, as people are trying to avoid, people aren’t making eye contact, they are moving around, and Jesus moves right in.

He says to Matthew, ***“Follow me,” he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.*** ***10 While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew’s house...*** So, now Matthew is going to invite colleges and friends over to meet Jesus and to talk with Jesus. ***...many tax collectors and sinners...*** I’ve always loved this because we’d separate the two in scripture and it’s like *I’m a sinner, but at least I’m not a tax collector. I know I’ve done some things, but I’m not a trader and I’m not a tax thief.* Isn’t that what we do all the time with our sin? We’re like, *This is what I am, but at least I’m not...* We try to justify our sin by pointing to greater sin. So, tax collectors and sinners ***...came and ate with him and his disciples.*** ***11 When the Pharisees...*** You’re going to see them both in this story and the next story we look at in few moments ***...saw this, they asked his disciples...*** that’s very important in the text to see. They asked the disciples

and Jesus hears them and Jesus answers, not the disciples. They asked the disciples, ***“Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?”***

12 On hearing this, Jesus said, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. It’s important to understand here that when we see this idea of Pharisees and the righteous, the idea there with the righteous is that it was implied by the Pharisees. They’re like, “We are the strict followers of the law, these people are not. And let me tell you, we follow it.” Jesus is saying, “Well that’s not the person then who needs me.” They were counting on that for themselves. “I come for the people who need me.”
13 But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”

We read this in scripture, right? Sacrifices without mercy are worthless. When mercy is lacking, religious, formal activities are meaningless. So we see the heart of Jesus in this text. And if you and I are not careful, follower of Jesus, if we are not careful, we can very much develop a mentality of we are worthy insiders and they are the outsiders. It can begin to develop an us verses them. If you ever get that spirit or you ever get that heart or mind that it’s “I’m the one who follows Jesus, I’m the righteous one. Don’t associate with them,” remind yourself what it says in Romans, 15: 7. ***7 Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you...*** Insiders can quickly forget that they too are sinners in need of a Savior. That you are the one, that you are a sinner saved by grace. We have to be very careful that we don’t develop this us verse them because Jesus says... I don’t know what pastor said this; I heard it years ago. *“Jesus goes and engages the person that many of us will cross the road to avoid.”* May that not be our heart ever.

Here's just a recap of hospitality last week and our desire. If you didn’t catch the message last week, we learned that hospitality welcomes the marginalized. Jesus said, “When you throw a banquet, don’t just invite your friends and family. They can repay you. Invite the marginalized, the poor, the lame, the blind. They can’t repay you.” Invite people that can’t repay you, the people that Jesus spent time with. Invite those who can’t repay you and you will be blessed, Jesus said. We hope then that it opens the door to every nation, tribe, and tongue.

The heart of this church is to move toward diversity. That you and I would understand that the gospel is for all – every nation, tribe, and tongue. And it does not play favorites, so this moves from culture into that socioeconomic. We looked at James. Remember we don’t bring rich people in, give them the best seats, and tell poor people to sit back there. That is not how it works. We said if you're doing hospitality right, it’s going to be messy, awkward, and exhausting.

I say this for those watching online. We know we got some comments last week. The heart of this church is that there is never a VIP table. But we understand that at times, we are not going to say everything just right. We’re not perfect. At times, we may say the right thing, but not in the right way, but our heart is that when you leave here... You show up on campus going, “They want me here.” And you leave going, “I matter to God and I matter the them.” In the process, it can be messy, awkward, and exhausting.

You know I love comedy. I hope many of you do as well. One of my favorites is Tim Hawks. I saw this clip years ago and it just fits perfectly as we enter into so how we are going to welcome our guests and as we get into some practical teaching on welcoming. What we do and why we do it. Check out what Tim Hawkins has to say. (Video Plays) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wzxlv5vdN9I> We welcome Arkansas today; we're glad you're here. Thank you for being here.

In thinking about what it means to welcome our guests here on campus and then all throughout our community... I sent an email to our staff and said, "Hey, share with me some dos and don'ts. Let's create the 10 Commandments for welcoming guests, for greeting our guests at church. I wish I could share with you're the emails... I mean, I had to summarize and clean up. It wasn't vulgar, but it was like... It really turned into therapy for our volunteers and staff as they were sharing.

We had about 30 or 40. I put in a list of 10, but this is brought from all different places on campus. With some of the, I'm a little embarrassed to share, so that's why I'm giving attribution to staff.

1. Thou shall not go in for a hug with every person you meet. Who here wants to be greeted with a hug? Who says, "Absolutely not; stay away from me you stranger." Who is like, "Depending on the day."

This next one is Stephanie Watson. I don't want to even put this up here, but she's having four new grandbabies next week and so I think this is a little personal for Stephanie. I still can't believe people do this.

2. Thou shall not touch a pregnant woman's belly and comment on her size. There's no way that happens. Does that happen? Listen, we learn at a very young age that you don't even compliment a pregnant woman. You don't even ask if she's pregnant, let alone touch. So, if a guest shows up on our campus, no touchy. Do not touch a pregnant woman or comment on her size.

3. Thou shall not ask too many questions or give unsolicited advice. Get to know someone first.

4. Thou shall no pass out cards or fliers for your business or event. Some of you have been doing this covertly.

5. Thou shall not invite them to serve on their first Sunday. Well talk about that one more in just a second.

6. Thou shall not hijack the conversation. When someone is sharing their story, listen. When you think their story is wrapping up, ask questions for more details. We all do this. Somebody is sharing a story that reminds you of part of your story and you're like, "Hey, I'm done with your story. Let me tell you about me." Keep it about them and their story.

7. Thou shall not ask if this is their first time at Woodland Hills. I've made this mistake more than once. I don't do it anymore. I said, "Hey, is this your first time?" They said, "I've been going here for seven years." Maybe you should stop being a guest.

8. *Thou shall not comment on a guest's relationship status or ask why they do not have children.* We don't need to get into family planning with our guests. We don't know the story and it's a little much.

9. *Thou shall not call out someone's sin in the first conversation.* Slow your roll.

10. *Thou shall offer thy seat.* Look at that. I got nothing on number 10. And this is where you need to be encouraged a little bit. Some of you are like, "No, I got here for this seat. I had 12 people walk by and eye me sitting in this seat. And I appreciate our guests, but they could get an alarm clock; that's what they could do. They could get a watch that works. That's what I think might help. Get a nice watch, get here on time, quit chitchatting out there at the coffee thing. Get in here and find a seat." I'm just expressing your emotion as why you won't move off these aisle seats.

This happened a couple of weeks ago. I called it out. It was in the last service, so it's not being taped. You do say a lot more when it's not online. But this senior adult in our church walks down this aisle and he's having a hard time. I don't know if you know, but we have a lot of uneven ground around here. He's having a hard time getting down the aisle. Everybody sitting on the aisle is just watching him. He's about to fall. He gets down to the front and he's still looking for a seat. He just keeps going. I finally stopped and go, "Somebody get up!" This guy is going to fall over and then the service is over. I don't know if you know that happens. When we have a medical emergency, it's over. You can see a guy reluctantly get up and give up his seat. And then he left.

This is for all of us. Why? At Woodland Hills we believe every member is a minister and that's very important, so let's talk about this. At this church, we welcome guests and invite them to be family. So, this is why you are not asked to serve on your first Sunday. We want to date. You need to get to know us. We need to get to know you. And I know some of you may be coming from another church. You moved here from another state, and you were very involved in your last church. We just say be a guest. We want you to be a guest.

You have guests over to your home, right? What do you do? You greet them in the foyer, maybe take them into the living room before dinner and then you take them in to the dining room. We have this. I have guests that when we're at the end of dinner, they're going to try to clear the table, do the dishes, take the garbage out. We tell them to let us do that. The family will stick around and do that. That's what we want to do.

We invite family to serve. We want to serve with hearts of hospitality. We want to care for our guests. How do you go from being a guest to being a family member? We have *Starting Point* here. There are still openings at the end of June. We encourage you to look at what it means to be a church member, what it means to plug in and serve. Our guests that show up here week in and week out and we want all of us... because we believe every family member is a minister. So those 10 commandments for greeting guests, that's not just for those wearing the big yellow "HI" button. That's for all of us. Give up that seat. Give up that parking space. And when a family member shows up, this is the heart all of us want to have, it's simply this – how can I serve, not this is how I'm going to serve. Sometimes people show up and they maybe even serve or work for a ministry and they're like, "Hey, I'm in this ministry; I need the church to now leverage their resources, their volunteers, and throw it all in behind what I'm doing." This is why we get to know each other.

We want you to be a part of the family, but in serving and caring for one another, we come with the heart of “How can I serve?” “What do you need done around here?” Rather than, “Here I am and here’s what I’m going to do.” We want you to have the heart of “How can I serve. You tell me the best way.”

As we look at the second story this morning, this one takes us straight to the heart of Jesus. The heart he has for tax collectors and sinners, and what the religious people think about it.

Number one we are going to see in Luke 15: 1. You can put the word *still*. Jesus is going to tell us in this story. This is the parable of the 99 and going away for the one. But we read in verse 1 that sinners still want to hear from Jesus. I’m convinced of this. Those far from God want to know what Jesus said. A lot of times, they want to know what Jesus said, but they don’t really care what your denomination interprets what Jesus said to me.

A lot of times, they don’t want the baggage of this relationship or of this church or that church, but what did Jesus actually say? This sometimes gets us in trouble because people... and I’ve seen it this week in our community, people misquoting scripture, misunderstanding scripture. Insiders and outsiders... whatever... it’s not using scripture correctly. But people still lean in when Jesus speaks. And when you share the words and the teaching of Jesus, it says in Verse 1 ***Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus.*** That’s the ultimate aim of this hospitality that we are talking about. How you treat someone in a restaurant, how you meet and gather with someone in your home. How you greet a guest here on campus on Sunday morning. The heart and soul is that they would hear from God, that they would understand who Jesus is. That’s the aim of all of this.

In verse two, here’s the main point we get. Jesus still welcomes sinners, and this bothers religious people. Religious people will always have an issue with who you are welcoming, and how you’re welcoming them. I’ve dealt with this for 27 years in ministry ² ***But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered...*** They murmured, they complained, ***“This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”*** So much so... What was he accused of? He was accused in Matthew 11: 19 we read ***19 The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.’ But wisdom is proved right by her deeds.”***

You need to know Jesus is the sinless Son of God, so he was not a glutton, and he was not a drunkard. Was he a friend of sinners? Yes. With the sole purpose of sharing with them the good news that that would lead to repentance. I’m here to tell you that when you follow Jesus and welcome sinful people, you will be accused of all sorts of stuff. People won’t like it. It still bothers religious people.

Here’s the heart – Verses 3 – 17 and it’s the third point. Jesus wants us to rejoice when sinners repent. This is the aim of all of our hospitality. In Luke 15: 3 – 7, ***3 Then Jesus told them this parable: 4 “Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn’t he leave the ninety-nine...*** It’s very important to understand here in this because sometimes people read this and go, “Well the 99 are not that important.” That’s not what Jesus is saying. The 99 are important. I heard a pastor years ago say, “You don’t fully understand the 99 and 1 idea until you’re the one. You don’t fully understand the grace of God until you realize he came after you and he came after me.

...Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine... in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? 5 And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders 6 and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' This is our heart, this is our attitude, we should be rejoicing. It's become a mission statement of our church for 15 to 20 years. We say it all the time. "Do for one what you can't do for all." It keeps people from hospitality, and it keeps people from serving. When they see the need or they see the numbers, they think it's too great.

Listen, you can share the good news with one person. You can show hospitality to one person. Do for one what you can't do for all. **7 I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents...** Do you know what I love about that text? Everything we're doing today is worth it if one person repents. I think sometimes in the church growth movement... I know there are documentaries online now and on television talking about the church and all of that. And yeah, there was some goofiness that came out of the church growth movement. I get that and I'm not getting into all of that today, but I do have to tell you sometimes we think, *Well, only this many people were baptized, only that many people were baptized.* We rejoice when one is baptized. It says **rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents... than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.**

Now, it's important to understand when Jesus is talking about the righteous it's like this is the attitude of the Pharisees. They're like, "We're the strict law followers. All of you other people are not." And Jesus is saying, "Well, you're saying you don't need me and I'm not for you." He says, "99 righteous persons who do not need to repent."

If you ever take this story and take from it that the whole point of Jesus being a friend of sinners or the whole point of **Jesus dining with tax collectors and sinners...** I've heard people quote it like this. It's because Jesus came to party. You've kind of missed the whole point of this text. The whole point of this text is that Jesus didn't come to party; Jesus came to dine with sinners so they would repent.

Now this is for our community. I know many of you may not know all that's going on in our community, but we need to understand the heart of Jesus in this with everything. There were lots of questions being asked this week. But I think we take clearly from this story and the first story today that **Jesus affirmed their value, not their sin.** Believers today have a very difficult time doing this. Every single person in here is an image bearer of almighty God. Every person in the courtyard is an image bearer of Almighty God. Every person in the chapel, every person watching online, which means you have automatic, intrinsic value. And Jesus saw the value in every single person. And dining with them said, "I see you, I see your worth, I see your value. But let me tell you that affirming of value doesn't mean we affirm sin." Sometimes we get this very backward. I'll get messages and people will be like, "I don't live a lifestyle that your church approves of. Will I be welcomed at Woodland Hills Family Church?" The answer is 100% absolutely yes, because you are an image bearer of Almighty God.

The problem then is the conversation moves onto, "Will you accept anything in my life I want to do and not tell me how to live?" That's the purpose of our welcome for you and for me. The gospel for you and for me is to call me to repentance and it's to call you to repentance. I can call you to repentance... you can be called to repentance and at the same time see your value.

Every person in here is an image bearer of Almighty God. But you move from being an image bearer to a child of God through faith alone in Christ alone – the repenting of your ways and you doing it your way. That’s where we are in our culture today. “You can’t say I’m valuable if you don’t accept my sin.” That’s not what Jesus teaches. Jesus says, “These people are all avoiding you and walking away from the booth. I’m walking right up to you and inviting you to follow me. And in following me, you know you are valuable, image bearer, but to be a child of God, you would turn from your sin.” We don’t welcome sinners to affirm their sins or to justify ours. Don’t ever use this text to say, “This is why I can go do Tequila shots with my friends this weekend.” That’s not the point of this text. The point of this text is that people matter to God and that Jesus calls us to repentance. Jesus welcomes sinners because he wants them to repent and believe in him... period.

Timothy Keller passed away not this past week but the week before. I just love his definition and explanation of this gospel message.

He says, “The gospel is this. We are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe. Yet at the very same time, we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope.”

When people go, “Tell me about my sin. How bad is it? It’s terrible. ‘Is it that bad?’” “Worse than you think. But the good news is you are loved and accepted in Christ Jesus more than you ever dared hope.

Our heart as a church is that we will welcome guests, knowing it’s going to be challenging at times, difficult at times. We want to show hospitality to those who are far from God. We want everybody who calls Woodland Hills Family Church home, members of our church, to be minister and share this and clearly communicate this. And we want you to do it far beyond this campus.

It was a really encouraging week on many fronts as you shared stories about how God used you this week. I’m not going to share names obviously, but a lot happened in restaurants. Some of you were a little over the top in restaurants. People were concerned about you. Do I need to call security?” Nope, we just heard a message on this, so I’m just kind of laying it on thick right now.”

I got this one and I asked permission to share this. It says, *“Good morning, Ted. My friend took me out for a birthday lunch this week and we were greeted by a server who was eager to serve us. We placed our drink and appetizer order and when she came back to the table, she began sharing her entire life story.*

At one point, she stopped to take a breath and she said, “I could tell you are locals.” To which we replied, “How can you be so certain?” She said, “Because you’re not as entitled as a lot of people I wait on.

Upon bringing our lunch, which she almost dropped in our laps, we learned she was a single mom of a 2-year-old and a 4-year-old, and was working two jobs, and lived with her grandmother, and lots of additional information about her life. We finished our lunch, and she came to offer me a complimentary dessert for my birthday. I asked what her favorite was, and she shared that she doesn’t get to sample things at his restaurant like she does at other ones, probably because everything is so expensive. I chose the blackberry cobbler with a scoop of ice cream. She brings it to the table, almost sliding into our lap. My friend and I realized our time together was clearly not what we intended it to be.

I'm always grateful for those that are just aware. Just paying attention to what God is doing in their lives, like okay, this was... but let's take this time to minister.

I admire how delicious the desert looks and she stands there just staring at it. Then I asked her, "Would you like to try the first bite?" Her face lit up and she said, "Yes, let me go get a spoon." She came running back, leaned over the table to work her spoon in and under the cobbler, making sure to get the berries, the crust, as well as the ice cream into a perfectly mounded scoop. She takes the spoon up to her mouth, putting the enormous bite in all at once, then licks the spoon and says, "Yep, that is delicious." By this point, my friend and I are just trying to contain our shock and laughter. So, I say, "Yes, and now you can honestly tell people that you have tried the cobbler and you can highly recommend it.

I just wanted you to know we are taking this challenge seriously and want to really be mindful of what God is doing. We're taking the challenge to a whole other level this week. Then this person added at the end, "Yes, we left her a very generous tip."

This is the purpose of our hospitality. It's telling people they matter, and they matter to God, yes. Calling them to repentance so they move from being just an image bearer to being a child of God, that is our heart and prayer for you today.

A lot of times, people will say, "You can't welcome me, you can't bring me in, and you can't show me all this unless you also..." We stay the course and we continue to show kindness, we continue to show love, we continue to show Unreasonable Hospitality (the book I'm reading) to people.

As we close with Romans 5: 8, we are reminded that God chose his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. That's the call for you and me today.

Father, we come to you as a church. To start with us as church family members, that we would be affirming of value but not of sin. That we would be clear on this and that we would dine with those who don't make us feel comfortable, who maybe don't look like us, or act like us. That we would speak words of high value, that we would call this value out in others, that we would not turn away and seek to avoid, but we would lean in. And that all of us would understand the power of the gospel and calling people to it that would lead them to repentance.

For our guests who are here today, we do hope they feel welcomed and greeted and that they leave knowing they matter to you. They matter to you so much so, Father, that you sent your son, Jesus, to die for them. And that today would be the day that they confess with their mouth Jesus is Lord, believe in their heart that he's been raised from the dead, that they would be saved.

I pray for this church and this community that we would continue to reach out, caring and loving people, welcoming them, inviting them to the family of Woodland Hills. We pray all this in the authority of the name of Jesus, and everyone agreed and said... Amen.