

# FIVE PRACTICES OF FRUITFUL CONGREGATIONS

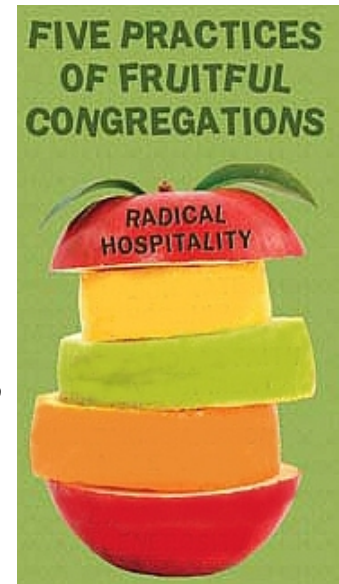
Devotion Guide Week #1= July 12-17

## Week One: Radical Hospitality

**Christian hospitality** is the active desire to invite, welcome, receive, and care for those who are strangers so that they find a spiritual home and discover for themselves the unending richness of life in Christ.

**Radical** describes that which is drastically different from ordinary practices, outside the normal, that which exceeds expectations and goes the second mile.

Practicing **Radical Hospitality** means we offer the absolute utmost of ourselves, our creativity, and our abilities to offer the gracious invitation and welcome of Christ to others. We pray, plan, and work to invite others and help them feel welcome and to support them in their spiritual journey. (Schnase, *Cultivating Fruitfulness*, p.8)



### **Day One**

"We love because he first loved us." 1 John 4:19

First things first: accept that you are accepted. We have all received grace upon grace in that before we thought of looking for God, God was already at work - inviting us to draw closer. You do not need to become "good" before God loves you - God loves and accepts you just as you are. Do you believe that? Today, spend time basking in the acceptance and love of God.

Prayer: *God I praise you that you have sought me out; that you love me exactly as I am. Help me to receive your love in thankfulness. Amen*

### **Day Two**

"Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me" Revelation 3:20  
Have you seen the painting that illustrates this scripture? If not, google it and look closely at the picture - there is no door knob on Jesus' side of the door!

Jesus invites us to show him hospitality by opening the door of our heart to him. He will not force, but he will persistently knock until we open the door. We show hospitality to God by inviting Jesus to live in our lives, by accepting his offer of grace and forgiveness and a new life.

Prayer: *Jesus, I open the door of my heart to you. Feel free to make yourself at home there. Redecorate, remodel, remake my heart and life to suit you. Amen*

### **Day Three**

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.” John 3:16

Even as we have experienced and accepted God’s grace through Jesus Christ, we understand that God’s offer of life and forgiveness is for all! Today we remember with gratefulness those who showed us radical hospitality - those who introduced us to the church and those in the church who faithfully demonstrated God’s hospitality in their lives. As we grow in our relationship with God in Christ, we understand that we are called to show that kind of hospitality to others - to live intentionally invitational lives. A question to ponder (and maybe even answer): who do you know that needs to hear that God accepts them just as they are?

Are you willing to be intentionally invitational to that person?

Prayer: *Jesus, I understand that you are standing at the door and knocking in the life of \_\_\_\_\_ . Use me any way you choose to remind \_\_\_\_\_ that he/she is loved by you and accepted by you. Amen*

### **Day Four**

“Jesus said, ‘I was a stranger and you welcomed me ... Just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’” Matthew 25:35, 40

Imagine what would happen if we took these words seriously! Imagine if we truly believed - and acted in accordance with that belief - that every stranger that showed up at our church on a Sunday morning might be Jesus in disguise.

Imagine yourself looking into the eyes of that child, teenager, single parent, older adult - and seeing the eyes of Jesus looking back at you.

Prayer: *Jesus, I choose to believe that you show up every week at my church.*

*Help me to be on the lookout for you in the eyes of each stranger I greet. Amen*

### **Day Five**

Jesus says, “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name, welcomes me.” Matthew 18:5

To become a vibrant, fruitful, and healthy congregation requires a change of attitudes, practices and values. Good intentions are not enough. Too many churches want more young people as long as they act like old people, more newcomers as long as they act like old-timers. It takes practicing Radical Hospitality, and all the redirecting of energy and resources that comes with this.

Churches can’t keep doing things the way they have always done them.

Consider: How willing are you to change your own attitudes and expectations so that our church - in worship and small groups - reaches out with intentional and radical hospitality to younger people and those with no prior church background?

Prayer: *Strengthen me, Lord, for the hard - but rewarding - work of hospitality with excellence and passion. Amen*