

Set aside any previous notions of hospitality which may require a four-course meal or beautifully manicured home. Not only will this book encourage you to see tangible and everyday ways that you can be a blessing to those in your sphere of influence; it will also open your eyes to see what a gift, privilege and joy it is to reflect the hospitality of our Savior.

SARAH WALTON, Author, *Together Through the Storms*

I loved this book. I was expecting a guilt-fuelled, task-list-populating, exhaustion-inducing exhortation to be the host with the most. What I got was a heartwarming, rich and motivating conversation with Carolyn as we dug into the Bible and gloried in the gospel together. Rather than cajole you into dutiful hospitality, this book inspires you to joy-inducing, gospel-rich hospitality. The fruit will be seen in extraordinary hospitality being demonstrated across the church family to the glory of God.

JONATHAN GEMMELL, The Proclamation Trust

Extraordinary Hospitality (For Ordinary People) fueled my desire to welcome others as Christ so richly welcomes us. Carolyn Lacey winsomely challenges us to humbly sacrifice not only our homes but also our efforts, skills and time to the one who gave us his very life.

HUNTER BELESS, *Journeywomen*

Deeply theological and refreshingly practical, this book paints the picture of an overflowing generous God, and seeks to help us be transformed more into his likeness. By taking a wide-angle view of hospitality, this book shows how we can all use our time, energy, home, possessions, talents and words to bless others as God has first blessed us. It is inspiring, challenging, beautifully written and full of grace.

MATT SEARLES, Author, *Tumbling Sky*

Carolyn's view is wide, as she encourages us to look beyond our friends to see those in need. Her ideas are creative—I am looking forward to inviting more people here to cook for me! But her goal is so simple: to help us love others humbly and practically, for the glory of God. How liberating!

HELEN THORNE, Biblical Counselling UK

What will inspire you to bother with hospitality? Turns out it isn't getting a new cookbook. We need instead to raise our gaze and explore the wonders of how God has welcomed us in the gospel. This thought-provoking book will help you do just that—and then give you lots of creative ideas on how you might begin to reflect God's "hospitality" in your own.

JULIA MARSDEN, Author, *Forgiveness*

The thought of hospitality makes some break out in hives and others start dusting off the serving dishes. Whichever you are, you will walk away from this book encouraged and convicted, and with practical insight into how to live out a life of welcome.

COURTNEY REISSIG, Author, *Teach Me to Feel*

Such a warm, challenging and encouraging book—lunch breaks, Sunday seating, washing up and dinner tables interwoven with glorious gospel truths, all pointing to the ultimate host. A very handy little book!

GABBY SAMUEL, Women's Ministry Development Worker, FIEC

Carolyn Lacey lets in the light of how wonderfully generous God is to us, and so she inspired me to be like him. If you would love to be a cheerful giver, rather than a reluctant one, then read here and in the Bible what God had in mind when he told us to “practise hospitality”.

LIZ COX, Minister for Women and Community, St. Giles' Derby, UK

In this inspiring book, Christian hospitality is beautifully defined and illustrated as the practical reflection of God's generosity to us in Christ. Carolyn helps us see that it is not about perfect homes or fancy cooking but an attitude of the heart that any Christian can put into practice.

JULIAN HARDYMAN, Senior Pastor, Eden Baptist Church, Cambridge, UK

Hospitality reveals our trust and confidence in the grace of God in Christ. In this fantastic book, Carolyn Lacey covers the biblical teaching on hospitality in helpful and practical ways. It will leave you amazed at the grace of God and equipped to engage in hospitality to others.

DAVE JENKINS, Servants of Grace Ministries

A gentle and biblical encouragement to show the same generous and indiscriminate welcome to others as God shows to us. Using passages from throughout the Bible, Carolyn Lacey moves us beyond guilt-inducing images of “entertaining” to a gospel-focused, other-centred ministry of love.

CLARE HEATH-WHYTE, Author, *Old Wives' Tales*

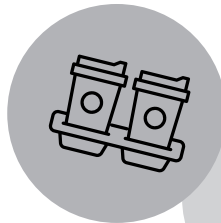
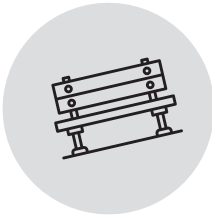
A warm and insightful book on a vital biblical theme. We worship an amazingly generous God, and as we practise hospitality, we reflect his character. In this pastorally sensitive and biblically balanced book, Carolyn Lacey anticipates and answers many of the questions that come to mind when we think about hospitality. Soaked in Scripture and full of practical advice, this book is highly recommended.

PAUL MALLARD, Pastor, Widcombe Baptist Church, Bath, UK



CAROLYN LACEY

**EXTRAORDINARY
HOSPITALITY**
(for ordinary people)



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COMPANY

Extraordinary Hospitality (For Ordinary People)

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For Andy and Kath:
You reflect God's generous welcome in so many ways.
It has been my privilege to learn from you.



Carolyn Lacey is a writer, speaker, pastor's wife and mother to two teenage children. Based in Worcester, UK, she teaches the Bible regularly at women's events and conferences.

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FOREWORD

This fresh and lively book, full of grace, earthed in reality, soaked in Scripture, has prompted me to reflect that it is more blessed to give than to receive.

It is most certainly a blessing to receive hospitality. I think of my early—and tiring, and rather lonely—days as an unmarried schoolteacher in my twenties in a small town far from home, and the kind older couple who repeatedly welcomed me to their home for Sunday lunch. I think I often stayed much longer in the afternoon than they might have wished, but they never let me know if that is how they were feeling! I think of countless friends who have refreshed my and my wife Carolyn's hearts with their kindness, opening their homes to us again and again. What a blessing to be on the receiving end of such open-hearted kindness!

And yet the Lord was right: it is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20 v 35). Such hospitality as we have been able to offer has reflected far more on my lovely wife's kindness than on mine. But what a blessing it has been, and continues to be, to welcome others into our home and our

lives. What riches of relationships, and often of enduring friendships, have been experienced and nurtured in those contexts! Friends' letters or emails are often sweetened with happy memories of time spent together—and the blessing they brought to us, which far exceeded anything we may have been able to do for them.

One of the many features of this book I have appreciated is the imaginative flexibility with which Carolyn Lacey enters into the very different circumstances to which the call to hospitality may come. Since getting married 38 years ago, my experience has perhaps been stereotypical for a man of my generation—a wife who loves to host, a succession of homes in which to live, and sufficient income to share. But this book recognises so many other contexts: those without homes suitable for welcoming others, men and women with inadequate income, and so on. Whoever you are, whatever your state of life, there will be something here for you.

Some of us brighten up at the mere mention of hospitality; it puts a light in our eyes. *Tell me more, give me ideas, I love this.* Others may groan inwardly, feeling that perhaps we ought to read this book, but wondering if we really have to. Wonderfully, there is something here—and perhaps some happy surprises—for you, whoever you are and however you feel about these things.

I write this during the coronavirus lockdown in the UK. I have been thinking that these days of being barred from welcoming others into our homes may have provoked one of four responses.

Those who just love to be hospitable to a rich variety of people found lockdown deeply distressing; they longed for the unlocking that would enable them to go back to

cheerful and vigorous hospitality. How good if that is you. How healthy to grieve at “social distancing,” however necessary it may have been for a period.

Quite a few of us had grown a little weary of the costliness of hospitality, perhaps discouraged at how little evident fruit we saw from our investments into people’s lives. If we are honest, we may have to admit that we loved the quietness and relished being able to have no one else in our homes, while keeping a joyfully clear conscience because the government forbade it! For many, lockdown was—in some measure—a blessed time of sabbath. If that is so, I pray that this sabbath will issue in renewed gladness and zeal in showing hospitality as and when we are allowed to do so again.

Perhaps for some this was a time quietly to pray, review, and make godly resolutions for imaginative and creative ways of pouring out the kindness and welcome of God to others. If that is you, this book could be just God’s timely provision: those are exactly the things which it will help you with.

But I suppose some must face the fact that lockdown didn’t really change how many people came into their homes, or how often, because they have never begun to learn the joy of hospitality. If that is you, please take this book as a most encouraging and bracing challenge to change!

May God bless you in fresh ways as you read, and grant you—like me—to feel again the truth of the Lord’s words: it is more blessed to give than to receive.

Christopher Ash

AN INVITATION

“**O**h no! You’re not going to tell us we need to have more people round for dinner, are you?”

That was my friend Debbie’s response when I told her that I was writing this book. I was surprised: Debbie is a fantastic cook, confident and outgoing, and always seems to have people staying in her home. But even she evidently feels overburdened and exhausted by the idea of hospitality.

I have felt like that too.

One low point came after a particularly long morning at church. I had arrived early to practise with the band, played for the service, had long conversations with a few people I knew were struggling, prayed with a couple of others, and was now trying—unsuccessfully—to extract my kids so we could get home. A well-meaning woman drew me aside and suggested that I think about having more people round for lunch on Sundays. She was concerned that my husband had been the pastor of our

church for a couple of years and there were people we still hadn't had over. Yes, I had small children, worked part-time and was involved in several different ministries; but another local pastor's wife always had ten people over for Sunday lunch, she pointed out, while I only ever seemed to invite a few at a time. I went home feeling guilty, discouraged and exhausted. The idea of hospitality had become a burden.

A few years later, I was teaching on the New Testament qualifications for church leaders (in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1). As we noted that an elder must be hospitable, I found myself asking, "Does Paul really mean that his wife (if he has one) must be great at cooking for loads of people? What if he doesn't marry? What if he marries a wife who struggles with anxiety or depression—or an eating disorder? What if he suffers with those things himself? What if he lives in a tiny flat with no dining table? What if he's an introvert? What if...?"

It is not just church leaders: the Bible calls all followers of Jesus to "practise hospitality", regardless of marital status, salary or house size—and to do it "without grumbling" (Romans 12 v 13; 1 Peter 4 v 9). But nowhere does it talk about tableware or traybakes. Neither does it link hospitality with expense, exhaustion or an extroverted personality.

So I'm not going to do that either.

We will all have friends who are great at hosting people for meals in their homes. Some are confident cooks; others are confident enough to say they're not—and order in! But most of us have many *more* friends who find the idea of hospitality overwhelming. Even some of those who appear to be great at hospitality secretly struggle with it.

It's time to rethink what hospitality is all about.

I want to show that hospitality doesn't have to be exhausting and overwhelming. And that is because it is not so much about *what* we do, but *why* we do it.

This is not a "7 Steps to Becoming the Perfect Host" book. Rather, it is an invitation to join me on a journey, learning to welcome like Jesus does. You won't need a large house or a dining table that seats eight—Jesus never hosted a fancy dinner party! You won't need a big food budget or lots of free time. You won't even need to be especially outgoing or confident. You just need to delight in God's welcome and desire to reflect it to those around you.

So over the next seven chapters we will look together at seven characteristics of God's welcome and see how they should reshape our welcome. Read as slowly or as quickly as you like—on your own, with a friend or in a discussion group. It may be most helpful to read one chapter each week, taking time to reflect and pray. At the end of each chapter there are a few questions to help you.

I have made lots of practical suggestions throughout the chapters. If you try to do them all, it will be overwhelming—and that is not the point of this book! Pick just one or two practical points from each chapter and start to weave them into your daily habits. If you do, you'll be encouraged by how simple hospitality can be—and how rewarding it is too.

I imagine that, like me and like Debbie, you feel very ordinary. I don't want to persuade you otherwise—we are ordinary. But our God is extraordinary. He invites us to reflect him in ordinary places to ordinary people—and he can do extraordinary things through us as we do.