



RBC CONNECT GROUP STUDY FOR WEEK 19/7/20

RBC: A FLOURISHING/THRIVING CHURCH

As always, the following questions are discussion starters for today's study.

To thrive: to grow or develop in a healthy or vigorous way, especially as the result of a particularly congenial environment.

To thrive (Bible): to grow luxuriantly; to increase and enlarge, as a healthy growing plant. To be prosperous; To grow in grace and in good works;

Bible Reading: 1 Peter 4:7-11,

⁷ The end of all things is near. So be watchful and control yourselves. Then you may pray. ⁸ Most of all, love one another deeply. Love erases many sins by forgiving them. ⁹ Welcome others into your homes without complaining. ¹⁰ God's gifts of grace come in many forms. Each of you has received a gift in order to serve others. You should use it faithfully. ¹¹ If anyone speaks, they should do it as one speaking God's words. If anyone serves, they should do it with the strength God provides. Then in all things God will be praised through Jesus Christ. Glory and power belong to him for ever and ever. Amen.

This week's reflection/study comes from Kimberly Smith, Generations & Emerging Leaders Pastor (BUV)

In our Flourishing Church Framework, the focus on Congregational Life includes the aspect of *hospitality*.

I wonder what comes to mind when you read that word? Perhaps you think of a *hospital* or maybe you immediately think of the *hospitality industry* - cafes, restaurants and hotels. Your thoughts might go to images of dinner parties with friends, or to specific people who embody hospitality in the way they conduct their lives and open their homes.

Hospitality is defined as *the friendly and generous reception and entertainment of guests, visitors, or strangers.*

1 Peter 4:9 says, "Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling." In attaching this exhortation to the 'one another', Peter makes it clear that hospitality is not an industry, a business, a role, or a location. It's something we are all encouraged to engage in - a heart posture we would all seek to hold. In Romans 12:13 Paul says, "Always be eager to practice hospitality." The Greek word used here is *philoxenos*. It's a hybrid of two words. *Philo* which means *friend* and *xenos* which means *stranger*. These words are an interesting pairing. In fact, they are opposites! But in that, we understand the fullness of the act of hospitality. To treat a stranger like a friend *or* to make a friend of a stranger.

What if that defined every single person's experiencing of encountering a Christ follower or a community of believers? What if our churches were places where people of every walk of life felt like a friend? What if the *strangers* in our country, our neighbourhood; our streets, found a place of friendship and inclusion amongst us? In Luke 19 Jesus encounters a man named Zacchaeus. Previously unknown to Jesus, Zacchaeus had heard He was coming through Jericho and climbed a tree to get a better vantage point. ⁵ *When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today."* ⁶ *So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.* Despite the incredulity of the crowd (that Jesus would meet with someone of Zacchaeus' reputation), Jesus went to his home. The encounter was one that catalysed radical transformation in his heart and life. "Salvation has come to this house!", declared Jesus. It wasn't just an invitation to a meal, but to a shared life. Jesus wasn't looking to be invited merely into Zacchaeus' home but also his heart. He demonstrated a way of living and interacting that went beyond words and teaching, to profound effect.

There is something powerful in the transaction of welcome, generosity and open-handedness that facilitates a deeper work. In the rest and warmth of genuine kindness, hearts are softened and opened.

In this season of isolation and 'social-distancing' many of our usual avenues of offering hospitality may not be open to us. But somehow, in our communication, in the things we choose to prioritise and promote, and in how we allocate time and money, we must still be intentionally shaping a community of welcome, inclusion and warmth. Where strangers are treated as friends and every effort is made to make a friend of a stranger.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION AND DISCUSSION

1. How would you assess yourself or your church in regard to *hospitality*? (What would others say about their experience of you/your church?)
2. What examples of hospitality do we see demonstrated in Jesus' ministry? What was the impact of those occasions? What can we learn from his modelling?
3. Paul says we must "*practice* hospitality" because it often goes against the natural gravitational pull to be more self-focused. What would Jesus reveal that you might need to lay aside in order to make space in your heart and life to extend the welcome of God?
4. What is one practical action you could take this week to show hospitality to someone?