



journal of biblical
perspectives
in leadership

Hospitality in Gospel Leadership: Jesus and the Samaritan Woman

Diane J. Chandler, Ph.D.

This paper explores the role of hospitality in gospel leadership, defined as the act of presenting the person, character, and work of Christ to others through the power of the Holy Spirit. With hospitality entailing a warm welcome and meeting the needs of the stranger or outsider, the paper first examines the John 4:4-42 narrative where Jesus engages the Samaritan woman in a hospitality tandem, all designed to draw her into a saving knowledge of himself. The historical background regarding the animosity between Jews and Samaritans serves as a backdrop to their interaction. A brief literary analysis of the John 4 text highlights the hospitality theme, extending to the townspeople whom she beckons to meet Jesus. Second, the paper highlights other instances in the New Testament where hospitality demonstrates gospel leadership in the four gospels, Acts, and the epistles. The third section of the paper offers practical applications connecting the theme of hospitality to gospel leadership. The paper concludes by highlighting the necessity of the Holy Spirit in guiding genuine hospitality initiatives to nurture relationships with the other—all in hopes of being Christ's heart, hands, and feet for gospel advance.

Hospitality in Gospel Leadership: Jesus and the Samaritan Woman

Jesus' interaction with the Samaritan woman at the Sychar well demonstrates the power of hospitality in gospel advance and the transethnic telos of his leadership. John's gospel recounts that "he had to go through Samaria" (Jn 4:4), suggesting Jesus' explicit intention to interact with this particular Samaritan woman who would subsequently encourage many in her town to meet and receive Jesus.¹ Since Jews and Samaritans maintained a hostile relationship, their unlikely encounter highlights Jesus' determination to bring salvation and life transformation to all, including the marginalized. Jesus crossing culturally laden ethnic and gender boundaries demonstrates gospel leadership through the vehicle of hospitality.²

This paper places the John 4:4-42 narrative in conversation with contemporary culture regarding establishing relational, transethnic connections nurtured through the vehicle of hospitality.³ I argue that both Jesus and the woman offered each other hospitality—she being asked to provide him with a drink at his request and Jesus offering her living water (Jn 4:10). Through their providential meeting, Jesus demonstrates how encountering the other without judgment can lead to spiritual transformation and gospel advance regardless of social location, including ethnicity and gender.⁴ Thus, the John 4 narrative exemplifies that racial reconciliation is both possible and necessary for the gospel to be called into effect for all races, ethnicities, and cultures, with Jesus as the exemplar (Mt 28:18-20).⁵

Biblical hospitality refers to welcoming of the stranger.⁶ In Greek, the word hospitality, or *philoxenia* (φιλόξενο), is comprised of two words: (1) *phileo* (φιλό), meaning "brotherly love" and (2) *xenos* (ξενος), meaning "stranger."⁷ Thus, hospitality entails participating in God's warm welcome and meeting the stranger's physical, social, and spiritual needs, the outsider, the poor, and the disenfranchised.⁸ In an ancient Mediterranean context, hospitality extended to travelers who needed lodging,

¹ All biblical references are taken from the New Revised Standard Version.

² I define gospel leadership as the act of presenting the person, character, and work of Jesus Christ as the perfect reflection of the Father to others in humility and grace through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.

³ Andrew E. Arterbury, "Breaking the Betrothal Bonds: Hospitality in John 4," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 72 (2010): 73-83.

⁴ William Hendriksen, *The Gospel according to John*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1953), 176.

⁵ See Diane J. Chandler, "Spiritual Formation: Race, Racism, and Racial Reconciliation," *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 13, no. 2 (2020): 156-75.

⁶ Thomas W. Ogletree, *Hospitality to the Stranger: Dimensions of Moral Understanding* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 7. The opposite of *philoxenia* is *xenophobia*, meaning the fear or hatred of foreigners or strangers.

⁷ See Benjamin Corey, "True Biblical Hospitality: Loving Immigrants, Strangers, and Enemies," *Sojourners*, 2013, para. 8–10, accessed March 14, 2022, <https://sojo.net/articles/true-biblical-hospitality-loving-immigrants-strangers-and-enemies#>; Christine Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 31.

⁸ Amy G. Oden, ed., *And You Welcomed Me: A Sourcebook on Hospitality in Early Christianity* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001), 14.

protection, and provision, with public inns a rarity and financial means often scarce.⁹ Rather than a gracious solo act, biblical hospitality connotes a heart posture, or “an orientation that attends to otherness, listening and learning, valuing and honoring,” whereby we discern God’s redemptive purposes in and for the other; and in so doing, further God’s mission to those before us.¹⁰

This paper begins first by describing the historical background of the John 4:4-42 narrative where Jesus meets the Samaritan woman. This section includes two subsections: (1) the historical background regarding the relational hostility between Jews and Samaritans, and (2) a brief literary analysis of the John 4:4-42 text relative to hospitality, where Jesus encounters the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well and the ensuing effect upon her town. Second, the paper moves to a discussion of the practice of hospitality as evidenced in other New Testament passages. Third, the paper offers practical application of the text to today, suggesting that enacting genuine hospitality becomes a cross-cultural gospel conduit demonstrating gospel leadership. Finally, the paper concludes by highlighting the Holy Spirit’s role in hospitality encounters as conduits for sharing and embodying the gospel in transethnic contexts.

Jesus Encounters the Samaritan Woman

Historical Background of John 4:4-42

Jesus engaging the Samaritan woman at the well could not have been more culturally scandalous.¹¹ Historically, Jews and Samaritans shunned one other. The underlying reason for their hatred relates to the Samaritans being descendants of two groups: (1) the Israelites who remained in the Northern Kingdom of Israel after the Assyrian captivity in 722 B.C., and (2) the foreign colonists from Babylonia and Media whom the Assyrian conquerors brought into the Samaritan region as inhabitants.¹² 2 Kings 17:23-31 affirms this historical reality, including the new inhabitants bringing with them their pagan deities. What resulted was religious syncretism, whereby Samaritan inhabitants worshiped their gods alongside worship of the living and true God (2 Kg 17:32-33).

Eventually, the Israelite remnant in the region intermarried with the imported foreigners, resulting in what the Jews regarded as ritual and ethnic impurity. Over time, the belief system and worship of Samaritan inhabitants morphed through sustained ritualistic and theological modification when compared to the Judaism practiced by the

⁹ Andrew Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels: Early Christian Hospitality in its Mediterranean Setting* (Sheffield: Phoenix Press, 2005).

¹⁰ Oden, *And You Welcomed Me*, 14-15.

¹¹ Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, vol. 4 (Sacra Pagina Series) (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1998), 117.

¹² Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel of John I-XII*, vol. 29 (Anchor Bible) (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 170.

Jews.¹³ For example, the Samaritans rejected the writings of the prophets and some historical accounts such as 1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings, 1-2 Chronicles, along with wisdom literature found in Proverbs and Psalms. Samaritans rejected these canonical writings by repudiating their emphasis on Judea and David's genealogical line centered in Jerusalem.¹⁴ Consequentially, Samaritans focused almost exclusively on the Pentateuch (i.e., Genesis through Deuteronomy).

Other sharp divisions also arose. First, Samaritans refused to worship in Jerusalem and established their religious center at a new temple built on Mount Gerizim.¹⁵ Mount Gerizim was where God through Moses pronounced blessings on the Jewish people before crossing the Jordan to take possession of the land (Dt 11:29), blessings repeated by Joshua during covenant renewal (Jo 8:33). Second, Samaritans thwarted the restoration of Jerusalem led by Zerubbabel following the Babylonian Captivity of the Southern Kingdom in 597 B.C. Third, when Alexander the Great and his Greek generals dominated Palestine around 330 B.C., they enlisted sympathetic anti-Jewish Samaritans to build their base in Samaria, further distancing their Jewish counterparts. Fourth, in the 2nd century B.C., Samaritans helped Syrian leaders in their wars against the Jews.¹⁶ Fifth, in 128 B.C., the Jewish high priest led the Jews to destroy Shechem and the Samaritan temple on Mount Gerizim, punctuating Jewish antipathy toward Samaritan worship practices.¹⁷

With this contentious history, animosity between Jews and Samaritans continued to simmer. However, what did draw them together was an expectation of one to come. For Samaritans, their belief was tied to a prophet-like figure called the "Taheb," one like Moses who would restore and rule as a messianic figure.¹⁸ Rooted in the promise of Deuteronomy 18:15-18, Samaritans believed that God would raise up a prophet like Moses as "the Coming or the Returning One" and put words in his mouth to which the people were to listen.¹⁹ The exchange between Jesus and the woman highlights the woman's understanding of a messianic figure to come but not his actual identity. Given this historical background, discerning the significance of the exchange between Jesus

¹³ Gary M. Burge, *John* (The NIV Application Commentary) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 140-41.

¹⁴ Ibid., 140.

¹⁵ Located in the West Bank south of Nablus and close to the biblical site of Shechem, Mount Gerizim consists of three peaks, considered collectively by Samaritans as a sacred mountain. Today, Samaritans comprise a Palestinian community of "a few hundred people." See "Mount Gerizim and the Samaritans," UNESCO (n.d.), accessed March 14, 2022, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/5706/>.

¹⁶ Brown, *The Gospel of John I-XII*, 170.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, vol. 1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 610, 619.

¹⁹ George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, rev. edit., *Word Biblical Commentary* (vol. 36) (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2005), 65.

and the Samaritan woman relative to hospitality becomes clear. The next section reviews the interaction between them.

Literary Overview of John 4:4-42

After learning of the Pharisees' concern regarding his growing ministry, Jesus leaves Judea to return north to Galilee (Jn 4:3). Rather than take the eastern bypass route through Perea, common among Jews to avoid the more direct route through Samaria, Jesus "had to go through Samaria," (4:4), an intentional decision linked to his divine mission of the One who sent him (cf. 4:34). After arriving in the town of Sychar, Jesus sends his disciples to secure food in the nearby town, leaving him alone at Jacob's well at noon.²⁰ Jesus traveling through Samaria to encounter this Samaritan woman accentuates the extent to which God loves one individual.²¹ His masterful interaction with her evidences the Father's care and concern for a single soul whose ethnicity and culture differed from his own.

Typically, women drew water together at an earlier, cooler time of day rather than at noon. Yet, this lone woman comes to draw water during the heat of the day, likely to avoid the presence of other women, augmenting moral suspicion. At the well, she encounters Jesus, who is tired and thirsty from the journey. Demonstrating gospel leadership, Jesus sensitively stewards a reciprocal process of extending hospitality to reach the Samaritan (and eventually those in her town) through seven exchanges—with each exchange threaded with hospitality.

First, as guest, Jesus asks her, as host, to give him a drink (4:7). Sherri Brown notes that Jesus puts himself "in the role of a supplicant requesting hospitality for a basic need" and that the Greek text is in the imperative: "Give me a drink."²² Kenneth Bailey observes, "Jesus understand profoundly the need to be a receiver," thus engaging in a hospitality interchange.²³ Asking a stranger for a drink, especially if an urgent need, would not have been considered unusual in this Middle Eastern context. Given hospitality norms, providing hospitality, even for strangers, was part and parcel of Mediterranean culture.²⁴

²⁰ Located at the foot of Mount Gerizim, Jacob's well is 250 feet from Shechem, which is why some commentators believe that Sychar refers to Shechem (see Brown, *The Gospel of John I-XII*, 169). The Samaritans identified as descendants of Ephraim and Manasseh—grandsons of Jacob and sons of Joseph. See Marianne Meye Thompson, *John: A Commentary* (New Testament Library) (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 98.

²¹ Cullen I. K. Story, *The Fourth Gospel: Its Purpose, Pattern, and Power* (Shippensburg, PA: Ragged Edge Press, 1997), 96-97.

²² Sherri Brown, "Water Imagery and the Power and Presence of God in the Gospel of John," *Theology Today* 72, no. 3 (2015): 294. She notes that the Greek text is actually an imperative: "Give me to drink," rather than a question.

²³ Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jesus through Middle Eastern Eyes* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008), 205.

²⁴ John Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality: Partnership with Strangers as Promise and Mission* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 15-20.

On the other hand, ancient Judaism cautioned men against conversing with a woman, especially when alone, to avoid sending the wrong message.²⁵ Crossing the gender barrier only deepens when Jesus asks the *Samaritan woman* for a drink, laden with countercultural perplexity, prompting the woman's surprise. Receiving food or water from Samaritans or using their vessels would bring immediate defilement to Jews. Yet, Jesus crosses social, cultural, ethnic, and gender boundaries to move this woman from this awkward cultural space to reception of living water through a methodical interchange.²⁶ In response, the woman asks a question, highlighting the inappropriateness of Jesus' request by identifying their ethnic differences ("How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?—v. 9).

Second, Jesus comments that if she knew the gift of God and who was requesting a drink, he would have given her living water (v. 10).²⁷ Jesus now moves from the position of guest to hospitable host by offering a gift, which also draws on Mediterranean hospitality expectations.²⁸ In response, the woman questions two things—his lack of means for drawing water ("Sir, you have no bucket," v. 11) and his identity ("Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well . . . ?," v. 12). Jesus whets her appetite for eternal realities, which appear to be overshadowed by pressing earthly ones. Essential for living, water needs to be drawn. Metaphorically, the woman needs to draw from Jesus in this dialogical exchange to find the true source of life. F. F. Bruce comments, "Here the water in Jacob's well, symbolizing the old order inherited by Samaritans and Jews alike, is contrasted with the new order, the gift of the Spirit, life eternal."²⁹ The "gift of God" as living water is indeed God's salvation, "life mediated by the Spirit sent from the (crucified and exalted) Revealer-Redeemer."³⁰

Third, to deepen his role as host in satisfying his guest's needs, Jesus affirms that "everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life" (vv. 13-14). Whereas well water comes from below, the water Jesus provides springs up into eternal life. As mentioned above, the true gift that Jesus alludes to earlier (v. 10) is explicitly identified here—eternal life. In response, the woman now asks for this water so she will not thirst again and need to draw more water (v. 15). Jesus has led her to see her physical need but not yet her

²⁵ Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 596-97.

²⁶ Keener notes that Jesus crosses four hurdles to reach this woman: (1) social boundaries (John 4:6-9), (2) the moral barrier (4:7-8), (3) the gender barrier (4:7-9), and (4) the ethnic barrier (4:9) in *The Gospel of John*, 591-601.

²⁷ What was Jesus referring to when he mentions "living water?" Brown suggests that living water refers to Jesus' revelation or teaching or the Spirit communicated by Jesus (*The Gospel of John I-XII*, 178-79). Marianne Meye Thompson contends that living water suggests eternal life and God's Spirit (*John*, 101).

²⁸ Arterbury, "Breaking the Betrothal Bonds," 77.

²⁹ F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 104.

³⁰ Beasley-Murray, *John*, 60. Interestingly, according to Augustine, the gift of God (living water) refers to the Holy Spirit in Joel C. Elowsky, ed., *Ancient Commentary on Scripture, John 1-10* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 148-49.

spiritual condition. However, Jesus skillfully shifts the dialogue from physical water to her personal life, which he uses to draw her to a deeper understanding of his true gift as the gift-giver.

Fourth, the interchange seemingly shifts midstream when Jesus asks the woman to “Go, call your husband, and come back” (v. 16). Jesus widens the circle of hospitality by asking the woman to call her husband, fully realizing her chequered past.³¹ Acknowledging having no husband (v. 17), the woman circumvents a complete answer, most likely resulting from a sense of shame. Jewish teachers forbade women from marrying more than twice, three times at the most.³² Jesus does not allow this exposé to sever the relational interchange and continuing hospitality, nor does he return to it after her admission.

Fifth, in not condemning the woman, Jesus affirms her honesty—that she has no current husband but has had five, while the man she is currently with is not her husband (vv. 17b-18). Changing the subject perhaps to deflect attention from herself, she suggests that Jesus is a prophet (:19), as her curiosity and spiritual thirst deepen. Despite her past, the Samaritan woman still has “religious questions and yearnings.”³³ Interestingly, Samaritans rejected prophets after Moses, anticipating that the final messianic Moses would one day appear (cf., Dt 18:18).³⁴ She raises the contentious issue of legitimate worship location, whether Mount Gerizim or Jerusalem (v. 20). Samaritans viewed Mount Gerizim as the holiest of mountains, leading to conflict with the Jews who established Jerusalem as their worship center. Interestingly, Arterbury sees her theological challenge as “testing the stranger” before extending further hospitality.³⁵ Nevertheless, she remains curious and tries to reconcile this Jewish “prophet” with her religious worldview.

Sixth, Jesus bypasses the religious worship center debate altogether (v. 21). Had Jesus adamantly upheld that Jerusalem was the superior place for worship, she likely would have rejected him as a false prophet.³⁶ Jesus avoids this possibility to ensure continued hospitality. By upholding the culminating message of salvation through spiritual hospitality that he has been patiently building, Jesus upholds Judaism as superior: “salvation is from the Jews” (v. 22), “But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him,” and “God is spirit” (vv. 23-24a). The coming hour

³¹ Arterbury, “Breaking the Betrothal Bonds,” 77.

³² See Beasley-Murray, *John*, 61; Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to St. John*, vol. 1, trans. Kevin Smyth (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), 433.

³³ Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to St. John*, 433.

³⁴ Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 610.

³⁵ Arterbury, “Breaking the Betrothal Bonds,” 78.

³⁶ Ben Witherington III, *John's Wisdom: A Commentary on the Fourth Gospel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 121.

includes “the cross, the resurrection, and the outpouring of the Spirit . . . that [seeks] true worshippers out of Jewry and out of Samaria and out of every nation.”³⁷

The life-giving Spirit blows where it will (cf. Jn 3:8), even to those outside the Jewish community, by extending the gift of hospitality and invitation. As Bruce suggests, the question is not *where* people worship God but *how* they worship him.³⁸ God's genuine worship cannot be tied to location or people group but rather to a singular heart devotion to the living God. The woman responds by acknowledging that she knows that the Messiah is coming and “when he comes, he will proclaim all things to us” (v. 25).

Seventh, having tapped into her inner spiritual thirst, Jesus announces, “I am he, the one who is speaking to you” (v. 26). The disciples’ arrival with food interrupts further response from the woman. Their seeing Jesus speaking with the woman reinforces Jesus’ esteem for women. William Hendriksen observes, “Thus, quietly and without ostentation, Jesus gives these men [disciples] a lesson in the true, spiritual emancipation of womanhood. Without changing any creation-ordinance regarding the proper place of woman, the Lord indicates that before God the soul of a woman is not less precious than that of a man.”³⁹ The hospitality exchange culminates in Jesus’ confident declaration as Messiah.

Jesus’ declaration causes her to leave her water jar and return to her town, beckoning the villagers to come to meet the man who told her “everything I have ever done” (v. 29), catalyzing an extension of godly hospitality to her townspeople. Interestingly, Witherington notes the irony of the woman leaving her water jug to return to her town to witness about Jesus, while the disciples have left Jesus to find food.⁴⁰ Keener observes, “The disciples had gone into a Samaritan town with apparently little effect on the populace; Jesus had ministered to one woman and brought the entire town to himself.”⁴¹ Hospitality received manifests in hospitality extended.

In summary, the woman never does offer Jesus the water that he has requested. She doesn’t need to. The hospitality extended by Jesus has met its telos—inviting the woman into a saving knowledge of himself—defying all artificial social, cultural, ethnic, and gender barriers. Through genuine hospitality characterizing his sensitive gospel leadership, Jesus interacts with the women to draw her into a relationship with himself. His hospitality creates a ripple effect, as the woman enthusiastically invites the townspeople to meet Jesus for themselves (v. 29). The result? “Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, ‘He told me everything I have ever done.’” (v. 39). As Barrett emphasizes the disciple’s task is to bear witness, he further adds, “The woman joins with John the Baptist as witness, and in fact

³⁷ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Light Has Come: An Exposition of the Fourth Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 53.

³⁸ Bruce, *The Gospel of John*, 109.

³⁹ Hendriksen, *The Gospel according to John*, 176.

⁴⁰ Witherington, *John’s Wisdom*, 121.

⁴¹ Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 624.

precedes the apostles.”⁴² By choosing this woman, in effect, Jesus elevates the position of all women, including Mary Magdalene, who witnesses to the disciples of the resurrected Lord (cf. John 20:19).⁴³

The ripple effect of hospitality continues, as the townspeople invite Jesus to stay with them, which he obliges for two days (v. 40). The length of a guest's stay is noteworthy. The *Didache*, a Christian manual developed before 300 A.D. referring to the Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, states: “Let every apostle who comes to you be welcomed as the Lord. But he should not remain more than a day. If he must, he may stay one more. But if he stays three days, he is a false prophet” (*Did.* 11.4-5; cf. 12.2).⁴⁴ Jesus seems to have abided by traditions of hospitality so as not to overstay his welcome but long enough to ensure that the conversion is assured. He fully receives the Samaritans' hospitality by dwelling and eating with them.

Many more Samaritans become believers “because of his word” (v. 41). They not only know Jesus for themselves, but they also have a personal testimony: “we know that this is truly the Savior of the world” (v. 42b). The gospel message of salvation readily embraced by the Samaritans contrasts with the Jews of Jerusalem who opposed him (cf. Jn 2:18, 20; 4:1-3, 44; 6:30, 41, 52).⁴⁵ Furthermore, Jesus' self-revelation has fulfilled the Samaritans' hopes and expectations, clearing the way for further gospel leadership to the Samaritans through Philip's subsequent preaching and miraculous signs (Acts 8:4-7), followed by Peter and John's baptizing them in the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 8:14-17). Jesus' hospitality to the Samaritans challenges sanctioned exclusivity as being normal.⁴⁶ Through his gospel leadership, presenting himself as Messiah and Lord, Jesus exemplifies that true worship in Spirit and in truth is not restricted to one people group, as he opens the gospel to the whole world, beyond the boundaries of Judaism, through the vehicle of hospitality.⁴⁷

Not surprisingly, Jesus draws upon a long tradition of hospitality, chronicled in the Old Testament. Four examples illustrate this tradition. First, Melchizedek, king of Salem, offered bread and wine to Abraham and blessed him after Abraham rescued Lot in a masterstroke of honor and hospitality (Gen 14:18). Second, Abraham extended hospitality in welcoming three unexpected visitors with a specific announcement to convey (Gen 18:1-15). Abraham quickly acts by first bowing in deference to them, then offering to wash their feet and provide respite, and finally by inviting them to dine with him and Sarah. These guests prophetically confirm that they will bear a son, even in

⁴² Charles K. Barrett, *The Gospel according to St. John*, 2nd edit. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978), 243.

⁴³ See Bailey, *Jesus through Middle Eastern Eyes*, 215.

⁴⁴ For the *Didache* citation, see Arterbury, “Breaking the Betrothal Bonds,” 80; Charles H. Talbert, *Reading John: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Fourth Gospel and the Johannine Epistles*, 2nd edit. (Reading the New Testament Series, vol. 4) (New York: Smyth & Helwys, 2005), 123-24.

⁴⁵ Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to St. John*, 455.

⁴⁶ Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality*, 20.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 457; Burge, *John*, 150.

their old age, and that God intends to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. These revelations occur in the context of hospitality.

Third, God's hospitality extends to Moses and the Israelite nation through the provision of manna as they traveled to the Promised Land. God exhorts Israel not to oppress the alien (Ex 23:9), because God "defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing. And you are to love those who are aliens, for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt" (Dt 10:18-19).

Fourth, regarding fair wages, Israel was to treat aliens equitably (Dt 24:14) and not deprive them of justice (Dt 24:17). God reminds them: "Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you from there; therefore, I command you to do this" (:18). Along with Israelite widows and the fatherless, aliens could enjoy some of the harvest left by harvesters (:20-21).⁴⁸ God reminds them again that the Israelites had been enslaved people in Egypt (:22). Looking forward, Jesus also solidifies the place of hospitality in gospel leadership for those who would come after him. The next section addresses biblical hospitality in other New Testament contexts.

The Practice of Hospitality Elsewhere in the New Testament

Christian tradition evidences a long history and practice of offering hospitality to those in the family of God, those considered one's neighbor, and those considered strangers. In Scripture, God challenges the people of God to be a hospitable people who represent a hospitable God.⁴⁹ Specifically, God the Father sent his Son into the world as *the* penultimate gracious and hospitable act. Then, the Father and Son sent the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, another hospitable act, to empower God's people for Kingdom advance. Consider the early church devoting themselves to fellowship in a family context of meals (Acts 2:42) and Paul's directive to "extend hospitality to strangers (Rom 12:13). Hospitality transforms relationships when inviting others to sit at a common table, receiving them with grace, and meeting felt needs as the embodiment of Christ's heart, hands, and feet.

Because Jesus was infilled and anointed by the Holy Spirit (Lk 4:1, 14), his ministry of hospitality was pneumatologically constituted, meaning that the Spirit moved in and through him to draw others to the Father. In light of many gospel narratives and epistles that render hospitality vital in the life of the believer and the church, this section highlights selected passages from the gospels and the epistles where hospitality reflects

⁴⁸ Also see Lev. 19:34: "When an alien lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him. The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the Lord your God;" and Lev. 23:22: "When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Leave them for the poor and the alien. I am the Lord your God."

⁴⁹ Joshua W. Jipp, *Saved by Faith and Hospitality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2017), 2-3.

gospel leadership. In such cases, hospitality in the life of Jesus always reflects divine encounter.

Hospitality in the Gospels

In Luke's gospel, we find Jesus eating meals with various people. Meals become conduits of hospitality and, as Tim Chester suggests, "represent friendship, community, and welcome," in addition to contexts for embodying and enacting mission.⁵⁰ Jesus demonstrates gospel leadership by eating with tax collectors and sinners at the home of Levi, powerfully communicating that the gift of God's grace is available to all (Lk 5:27-31), while condemning hypocrisy on another occasion where Pharisees criticize him for not washing before eating (Lk 11:38). Jesus is anointed at the home of Simon the Pharisee during a meal, whereby Simon's lack of hospitality comes to the fore after a sinful woman anoints Jesus (Lk 7:36-50). After the woman dries the tears that have fallen on Jesus's feet, she kisses them, and pours oil on them in "a shocking degree of intimacy."⁵¹ Joel Green observes, "Everything about this woman is wrong; she does not belong here and the actions she performs are inappropriate in any setting for someone like Jesus."⁵² Yet, Jesus receives her gesture as a gracious guest, recognizing her sincerity. With this woman, as with others, Jesus's reception of hospitality extends to the marginalized and rejected. His association with them reveals God's extravagant grace. Jesus personifies gospel leadership through forgiveness, gratitude, and the power of reciprocal love to redeem and restore, which the sinful woman received.

In Luke 9:10-17, Jesus serves as a gracious host in feeding the five thousand, chronicled in all four gospels, demonstrating that he is indeed the bread of life (cf., Jn 6:35, 41, 48, 58). In other words, Jesus is both the host of eternal life and the meal itself.⁵³ Elsewhere, Jesus highlights how hospitality should extend to the marginalized when conveying the Parable of the Good Samaritan to an expert in the Law (Mt 10:25-37). Jesus presents the Samaritan man as embodying an ethic of hospitality by actualizing the love of God through the love of neighbor. In contrast to Jewish religious leaders, the Samaritan, an unlikely source, provides a model of costly and inconvenient hospitality.

At another Pharisee's home, Jesus takes this opportunity to counter legalism on the Sabbath after healing a man with dropsy (Lk 14:1-14).⁵⁴ Jesus shares the Parable of

⁵⁰ Tim Chester, *A Meal with Jesus: Discovering Grace, Community, & Mission around the Table* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 14.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁵² Joel E. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (New International Commentary on the New Testament) (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 309. For more on the Pharisees viewing the woman as engaging in scandalous intimacy, see Craig L. Blomberg, *Contagious Holiness: Jesus' Meals with Sinners* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 131-37.

⁵³ Pohl, *Making Room*, 30.

⁵⁴ Dropsy, or edema, refers to the swelling of soft tissues caused by excess water accumulation in the body.

a Great Banquet, where those invited offer excuses for not attending (i.e., busy with property, work, and family). The master instructs his servant to go out to call in the poor and disabled (:21). The message continues to reverberate—Jesus invites the disenfranchised into his hospitable community.⁵⁵ Chester aptly asserts, “The table fellowship of Jesus, with its ethic of grace rather than reciprocity, was creating a new countercultural society in the midst of the Empire.”⁵⁶

The role of guest continues, for example, when Jesus stays at the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus (Lk 10:38-42). Jesus even goes so far as to invite himself to Zacchaeus’s home (Lk 19:5-6). By welcoming Jesus into their homes, they become guests of God’s redemptive hospitality.

One of the most compelling N.T. passages related to instructive hospitality appears when Jesus speaks of Kingdom qualification, referencing the sheep and the goats (Mt 25:31-46). Interestingly, Jesus identifies hospitable practices as qualifiers: “for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited” (:35-36). Jesus’ instruction is explicit. We are to offer hospitality to those who can least reciprocate. As Oden reminds us: “Eyes that can only see Christ in the triumphant and powerful will fail to recognize Christ present in the stranger or the poor.”⁵⁷ Gregory of Nyssa similarly comments, “The stranger, those who are naked, without food, infirm and imprisoned are the ones the Gospel intends for you [to reach].”⁵⁸ It requires eyes to see Jesus in the other.

However, hospitality through table fellowship crescendos at the Last Supper (Lk 22:7-23), where Jesus becomes the master host who humbly serves his followers. The bread and wine convey welcome to disciples who participate in the life of God’s Son and anticipate his return. Looking back to Passover and forward to the Messianic Kingdom, the Lord’s Supper confirms God’s eternal hospitality in the coming age, with the cross as the entry point.⁵⁹ Through the Eucharist, Christians are re-invited to participate in the life of Jesus—his resurrected life, and through the Spirit, the promise of eternal hospitality in the Kingdom to come.

Although the disciples “will not eat it again it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God” (Lk 22:16), they could rest in knowing that Jesus would “go to prepare a place” for them, with his promise to return and take them with him (Jn 14:2-3), another indicator of eternal hospitality. The Eucharist itself sets the hospitality of God on full display, with

⁵⁵ Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality*, 36.

⁵⁶ Chester, *A Meal with Jesus*, 81.

⁵⁷ Oden, *And You Welcomed Me*, 51.

⁵⁸ Gregory of Nyssa, “Homily: As You Did It to One of These, You Did It to Me,” in Amy G. Oden, ed., *And You Welcomed Me: A Sourcebook on Hospitality in Early Christianity* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001), 59.

⁵⁹ Chester, *A Meal with Jesus*, 103.

divine love beckoning all to come to the table in humble solidarity as a manifestation of loving God and loving neighbor through a declaration of hope. Just as in the Eucharistic breaking of bread during his post-resurrection encounter with two disciples on the Emmaus Road (Lk 24:13-35), Jesus becomes known through breaking bread over a meal, which so often is where the Spirit moves in contemporary settings today. Like the first century, the Spirit builds the developing community through hospitable agape love.⁶⁰

Hospitality in Acts and the Epistles

The inbreaking of the Spirit at Pentecost signals God's ongoing ministry of hospitality, where redeeming grace and divine love extend beyond Jewish strictures to the whole world (Acts 2:1-21; 9:15). Meal fellowship would now include Samaritans and Gentiles, with the Spirit being divine host, resident within believers, and the divine dispenser of hospitality to others through genuine grace-filled *koinonia*.⁶¹ In the words of Paul, "Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God" (Rom 15:7). Jews were to accept Gentile believers as honorable members of the body of Christ who also are sent into the world. However, this widening gospel access causes angst for Peter when directed by the Spirit in a vision to respond to Cornelius's invitation to visit, which results in Cornelius sending his emissaries to Peter. In hospitable Middle Eastern fashion, Peter invites Cornelius's emissaries to spend the night with him before leaving Joppa for Caesarea. Early church believers continue the tandem of being both host and guest through the Spirit's presence and direction as the gospel advances.

Numerous passages exhort believers to practice hospitality. For example, following the Spirit's outpouring, the postnatal church daily broke bread in homes, eating together, experiencing joy, and welcoming new converts (Acts 2:42-47). After exhorting believers to love and honor one another, Paul instructs them to "contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers" (Rom 12:13). Paul also presents Timothy with qualifications for overseers, including being hospitable (1 Tm 3:2), while also exhorting Titus to the same (Tim 1:8).

In addition to the apostle Paul's verbal directives, Koenig highlights three observations that represent Paul's gospel leadership and missional focus through tangible hospitable acts as both receiver and giver.⁶² First, Paul, as receiver, experienced extremes in provision but welcomed hospitality ("In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need," Phil 4:12). He received provision from the Philippian church (Phil 4:15-16), one of the few that supported him. Second, as giver, Paul offered provision by collecting the saints in Jerusalem (Rom 15:26-27), with Gentile believers providing for their Jewish counterparts. Recognizing the mistrust between Jewish and

⁶⁰ Lucien Richard, *Living the Hospitality of God* (New York: Paulist Press, 2000), 50.

⁶¹ See Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality*, 134-35.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 71-82.

Gentile believers, Koenig suggests, “What Paul foresees here is a new stage of partnership with strangers. . . . We must presume that he expected it somehow to hasten the ingathering of ‘the full number of the Gentiles,’ . . .”⁶³ Third, as teacher, Paul sent a tactful letter to Philemon, the Christian enslaver, urging him to welcome back previously enslaved Onesimus as a brother. Paul admonishes Philemon to receive Onesimus back again as a guest, as though Onesimus were Paul himself. Through all three texts, Paul demonstrates that “every act of hospitality by believers takes place on both the spiritual and physical levels,” reflecting gospel leadership.⁶⁴

Exercising hospitality is also an essential indicator for leadership fitness and the glue that held the early church together. Believers are challenged in Hebrews 13:2 to show hospitality to strangers, as they may be angels unawares (Heb 13:2), and Peter challenges believers to offer hospitality “without complaining” (1 Pt 4:9). The late Bolivian theologian Mortimer Arias observes that the gospel message advanced as a “centripetal mission or evangelization by hospitality.”⁶⁵ Historically, gospel advance came through the gift of hospitality by serving as the extended heart, hands, and feet of Jesus, suggesting gospel leadership at its finest. The next section draws practical applications from the John 4:3-42 narrative of Jesus with the Samaritan woman and the other New Testament examples previously described.

Practical Applications

The encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman and the highlighting of other New Testament texts around the theme of gospel leadership through hospitality provide timely lessons applicable to us today.

First, gospel leadership involves hospitality—the sharing of experiences and meals with those from different backgrounds forging trust and relational bonds, which make room for sharing the gospel—the love of God in word and deed. Hospitality in the Scriptures usually centered around personal welcome of another, as when Jesus offered rest to the weary (Mt 11:28-30), the offering and receiving of personal provision to meet felt needs as Jesus embodied with the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:7), and the sharing of table fellowship in the early church (Acts 2:42). When Jesus shared meals with others, he often “challenged the prevailing religious and cultural boundaries by the company he kept and exposed the hidden patterns of social exclusion. He was a guest in the home of tax collectors, dined with sinners, and taught hosts to welcome those most likely to be excluded.”⁶⁶ However, the intimacy of a shared meal breaks the power of exclusivity, lowers defenses, and contributes to mutual acceptance. It should be noted that gospel leadership upholds the cross as the precursor to hospitality. The apostle Paul exemplifies gospel leadership when exhorting the Ephesians that the

⁶³ Ibid., 74.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 80.

⁶⁵ Mortimer Arias, “Centripetal Mission or Evangelization by Hospitality,” *Missiology: An International Review* 10, no. 1 (Jan. 1982), 69-81.

⁶⁶ Pohl, *Making Room*, 73.

“dividing wall” of hostility” between Jews and Gentiles was destroyed at the cross through the blood of Jesus (Eph 2:11-22). Through the cross, both Jews and Gentiles became fellow citizens as members of God’s household, which dismantled ethnic exclusivity led to gospel advance.

Second, gospel leadership reflects concern for *the one*, not just the multitude, regardless of race, ethnicity, religious status, gender, age, and moral history.⁶⁷ For example, Jesus prioritized the Samaritan woman over others when traveling through Samaria (Jn 4:4) while personally engaging Nicodemus, an individual member of the Sanhedrin (Jn 3:1-21). Jesus received the sinful woman (Lk 7:36-50), and he invited himself to Zacchaeus’s house (Lk 19:1-10). Jesus’ gospel leadership to *the one* teaches us that God personally invites individuals into relationship with himself and that every effort to reach *the one* is needful.

Third, gospel leadership through hospitality counters *xenophobia* (Gk. fear of the stranger). In our contemporary culture, some quarters of Christendom resist transethnic community-building, even among ethnic groups in the same locale. Furthermore, with immigrants relocating in increasing numbers, the people of God have an opportunity to provide welcome and assist with felt needs. Joshua Jipp emphasizes, “The Scriptures emphatically reject xenophobia. The people of God are meant to show a different way,” and “must reject anything that dehumanizes, stigmatizes, and perpetuates violence against the marginalized and vulnerable.”⁶⁸ Without discriminating, Jesus’ mission to reach those outside the boundaries of Judaism highlights that he had “other sheep that did not belong to this fold” (Jn 10:16). When God’s people show hospitality to others, including foreigners, they welcome the Lord (Mt 25:35).⁶⁹

Fourth, gospel leadership through hospitality embraces a posture of listening. In a world with many conflicting voices, having a listening posture communicates a caring, unjudgmental demeanor toward the marginalized. “People are transformed when someone is willing to listen to their stories, to share a meal with them to find their insights and concerns important and interesting.”⁷⁰ Active listening contributes to healing for those who carry pain and rejection and leads to asking sincere questions, not to pry or expose, but rather to express genuine concern and build up the other so that the relationship may deepen.⁷¹

⁶⁷ See Witherington, *John’s Wisdom*, 125.

⁶⁸ Jipp, *Saved by Faith and Hospitality*, 9.

⁶⁹ Edward L. Smither, *Mission as Hospitality: Imitating the Hospitable God in Mission* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2021), 19.

⁷⁰ Christopher L. Heuertz and Christine D. Pohl, *Friendship at the Margins: Discovering Mutuality in Service and Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2010), 80. Cf. Richard, *Living the Hospitality of God*, 12-13.

⁷¹ Smither, *Mission as Hospitality*, 125.

Conclusion

Through an analysis of John 4:4-42, this paper argued that extending hospitality to those of a different race or ethnicity reflects gospel leadership, which I define as the act of presenting the person, character, and work of Christ to others through the power of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit led Jesus to meet the Samaritan woman, and Spirit enabled him to discern her background. The Spirit caused the woman to discern that Jesus was more than a prophet, and the Spirit prompted her to testify to her townspeople. The Spirit who opened the hearts of the Samaritans so that they could embrace Jesus as “the Savior of the world” (Jn 4:42b) oversaw gospel advance to an entire people group. Through acts of hospitality and welcome, the Holy Spirit can extend invitation, love, and grace that testifies to the person and character of Jesus.

The Holy Spirit blows (cf. Jn 3:8) in unusual places to those we might not normally encounter. Yet, if our hearts are open, God can use the gift of hospitality to draw others to himself. Of course, hospitality involves not only being hospitable hosts but also learning to be appreciative guests. As Koenig rightly observes, “The Spirit speaks within us, assuring us of our own welcome by God (Rom. 8:15-17); but [he] also calls us forward, leading us into new frontiers of hospitality. According to Luke especially, it is the Spirit who enables us to change our guest and host roles in ways that are appropriate to the Church’s mission.”⁷² May each of us encounter new frontiers of hospitality authored by the Holy Spirit to make Christ known in transethnic contexts through gospel leadership.

About the Author

Diane Chandler serves as an associate professor of Christian Formation and Leadership in the Regent University School of Divinity in Virginia Beach, Virginia. She holds a Ph.D. in Organizational Leadership and an M.S. degree in Education. She publishes widely on themes related to Christian formation, ethical leadership, women in leadership, pastoral self-care, and burnout.

Email: diancha@regent.edu

⁷² Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality*, 134.