

Pursue Hospitality

September 16, 2018

Today, we are beginning with a quiz. Take out a piece of paper. This is a simple six question quiz. Don't worry. You can't fail and you won't turn it in for a grade. This quiz will set us up for the rest of our study.

1. How many times were you invited over to the home of someone from CrossWinds in the last year?
2. This year, how many people from CrossWinds reached out to you to build a relationship beyond Sunday morning? (How many people have called you on the phone, invited you to lunch and showed they care about you outside of Sunday morning?)
3. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the weakest and 5 being the strongest — how likely do you think it is for someone to visit CrossWinds and stay at CrossWinds because of the way they are cared about beyond Sunday?
4. In the past year, how many times have you invited someone from CrossWinds over to your home for a meal?
5. This year, how many times have you taken the initiative to reach out to someone at CrossWinds so you could build a relationship with him or her beyond Sunday morning?
6. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being weak and 5 being strong, how likely is someone to stay at CrossWinds because of the way you care about him or her beyond Sunday morning?

These are tough questions. They are revealing questions. They are honest and helpful questions that each of us needs to ponder.

This morning is Vision Sunday. On Vision Sunday, I like to focus on the mission of CrossWinds and call attention to a way we can better live it out.

The mission of CrossWinds is just outside the worship center on the wall as you come in the center doors. It is, "Passion for God, compassion for our neighbors, and reaching our region and beyond with the life-changing message of Jesus."

This morning, we will look at one area of focus in our church to help fulfill our mission. That is hospitality. This morning, we will learn what the Bible says about hospitality and why hospitality is essential for the health of the church and for the evangelism of the world.

The truth is the American church has missed the importance of hospitality in part because we have over-personalized our relationship with Christ. We talk about Jesus-and-me. While our salvation is a personal thing, we forget that God saves us into a corporate body called the church. In our salvation, God gives us spiritual gifts to serve one another in the church. He calls us to love one another in the church. Hospitality is one of the most practical ways we can love one another in the church.

Our outline is as follows: What does hospitality mean? What does the Bible say about hospitality? What are the benefits of hospitality? What is our CW plan to be a more hospitable church?

What is biblical hospitality?

Hospitality comes from a compound Greek word that literally means *love of strangers*. It carries the idea of loving people we would not usually spend time

with. Let me give you a working definition of hospitality that we will use this morning:

Hospitality is treating someone that is not a family member or close friend as an honored guest, usually in our homes.

Hospitality means opening our homes and our lives to people that are not part of our immediate circles. It usually involves food. It usually takes place in our homes.

Hospitality is not unique to Christians. Even though the ancient world was a very inhospitable place, there are still many examples of hospitality being shown by pagans in the ancient world (Acts 28:7). Today many businesses have also learned the importance of hospitality. They realize that are not just selling a product; they are selling an experience. Caring for that stranger that walks in the door of your business is important. Most coffee shops have figured this out.

While non-Christians offer hospitality, Christian hospitality is different and distinctive. Christian hospitality is not offered to increase the profit margin. It is from a heart that overflows with gratitude to God for what he has done for us in Jesus. God overflowed with grace and care for us. He opened his family to us. He sought us when we were strangers. Our hospitality to others is a response to that. We extend grace and care to others who are not part of our friend group. We open our families to them. We seek them out, just as God has done for us.

What does the Old Testament teach about hospitality?

In the Old Testament, hospitality, especially to strangers, was always to be one of the defining qualities of God's people.

When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you

shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God. Leviticus 19:33–34 (ESV)

God's vision for his people is that they would not circle the wagons and become an ingrown group but that they would open their hearts and their lives to foreigners traveling through their land. They were to treat foreigners with the same kind of attention and concern that they would give an honored relative. In that way, God's love and grace would be known by the people around them because foreigners experienced hospitality and care, not hostility and isolation, which is what so many foreigners experienced in other lands.

What does the New Testament teach about hospitality?

The New Testament sharpens our understanding of God's desires for us in this area.

Hospitality must be pursued.

...contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. Romans 12:13 (ESV)

We need to remember the context when Paul wrote these words. In the first 11 chapters of Romans, Paul explained what God has done for us through Jesus. Paul came to Romans 12 and began to explain how, out of gratitude to God for what he has done for us through Jesus, we are to live. Since Jesus has completely forgiven us and God's Holy Spirit now lives in our hearts making us new people from the inside out, we should live in line with the new people God created us to be. Paul told us what the new way of life God has created us to live looks like. One of the ways God changes us is in the area of hospitality. Christ makes us hospitable people.

Hospitality is not something we hope happens. We make it happen.

Paul said that as Christians live out our new lives in Christ we are to *seek to show hospitality*. We already know what the word *hospitality* means, but what may surprise us is the definition of the word *seek* in Greek. It means *to pursue tirelessly*. In classical Greek, it was used for hunting. It describes the way a hound chases a fox. It was used to describe the way a cheetah chased a gazelle. *It means to be utterly devoted to the pursuit.*

This should completely change the way we understand Christian hospitality. As Christians, we are not allowed to simply hope hospitality happens. We are commanded by God to make hospitality happen. We are to be utterly devoted to pursuing relationships with people we don't know, especially our Christian brothers and sisters in the church. We are to be devoted to inviting people over to our homes where we open our hearts and lives to them.

While we are to care for all people, we have a particular responsibility to open our homes to other Christians that are not part of our family and friend group. We also have a responsibility to open our homes to strangers visiting our church. We are to share meals with them. We are to be utterly devoted to showing love through hospitality. In short, we are committed to making sure nobody feels like an outsider but everybody feels like a loved insider.

When we see a new family in church, we are not allowed to be content to shake their hands during greeting time and call it good. We have a command from God to genuinely care about them and be friendly to them and invite them to a meal — preferably at home.

Why is this such an important part of our faith? God pursued us. God went out of his way to build a relationship with us and to love us. He opened up his family to us. He adopted us, making us his sons and daughters. God tirelessly pursued loving us. We are to do the same for others. We are to pursue loving them. We are to love them through our homes, care and food.

Hospitality is not a luxurious extra virtue for some Christians. It is an essential practice of all Christians. Realize Paul does not place hospitality on the periphery of godliness, where the modern church places it, like it is a luxurious extra virtue practiced by a few. Paul said hospitality is an essential practice for every Christian.

When we see a new family at church, we should feel an obligation to build a relationship with them and to invite them over our homes. We do not wait until the last possible minute hoping someone else will invite them first so we can get out of our responsibility. We eagerly pursue the opportunity of hospitality. God calls us to be hosts that are disappointed when we don't have the opportunity to love someone by opening our home and sharing a meal.

God calls us to extend hospitality to one another in the church.

The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. 1 Peter 4:7–9 (ESV)

Let's look at a few key points in these verses.

The hardest time to show hospitality is the most important time to show hospitality. Remember the context of 1 Peter. God's people were experiencing persecution. People were either losing their lives in Rome or about

to lose their lives. The persecution of Christians was ramping up under Nero. This is why Peter said *the end of all things is at hand*. People were majorly stressed. Christians were afraid to gather for worship. What do we instinctively do in times of stress? We instinctively pull inward to limit our focus to our family. Yet Peter said, *Keep on loving one another* in stressful times. He said, *Above all* keep loving one another in stressful times. *Earnestly* love one another in stressful times.

What is interesting is Peter then tells us how to love one another in stressful times. We are to love one another by showing hospitality to one another without grumbling. When life is hard, keep loving people and do it through hospitality. Have people over your home for a meal so you can eat together, pray together, and support one another. That hospitality will provide the spiritual encouragement we need. The challenge is when we are stressed, we want to pull in. We want to stop hospitality. When we stop hospitality, we stop loving one another, yet that is when hospitality between Christians in the church is needed most.

Hospitality is to be shown to those we don't usually spent time with in our church family. One of the things that struck me as I was meditating on this verse is we usually think of hospitality as something we extend to visitors. Here we find hospitality is something we are to extend within our church family, to people we only have a passing relationship with on Sundays. This helps the church function as a huge family when we go out of our way to have people who are not part of our immediate friend group at church over to our homes.

I ask you, when it comes to people in your church family, do you just open your home to close friends or do you pursue opening your home to people at church that you know only in passing? This is the way we love one another. This is the way we help one another through hard times. This is one of the reasons we have life groups that meet in homes. It is a form of hospitality.

Hospitality covers a multitude of sins. The text also says that love covers a multitude of sins. The problem is saying love covers a multitude of sins reduces that phrase to merely a platitude if there isn't a concrete way we show our love. The directive Peter gave in this verse on how to show love that covers a multitude of sins is that we should be hospitable to others in our church family.

When we think about it, we know how this works. In any organization, such as the church, each of us says things or does things that get under people's skin. We hurt people. It is only a matter of time until it happens for all of us. We are sinful. We disappoint one another. Most of these relational wounds are not fatal. They are irritating nicks, cuts and bruises. The accumulation of little wounds slowly rots relationships between people. But what happens when someone invites you over his or her home for a meal? What happens when someone serves mouthwatering lasagna and laughter around the dinner table? Instead of remembering the nicks, cuts and bruises, you remember the lasagna and care you were shown by a brother or sister in Christ when they had you over for a meal. The hospitality heals broken relationships.

Hospitality with a bad attitude ruins the meal. I love the way Peter said this. We know Peter was married so he understood the stress that often comes

with hospitality. That is why he could say, “Show hospitality without grumbling.”

Peter knew how easy it is to grumble over the financial and emotional stress that comes with having someone over your home.

He also knew that when you have an amazing meal but it is served with a bad attitude, you ruin the meal. The Bible says...

**Better is a dinner of herbs where love is than a fattened ox and hatred with it.
Proverbs 15:17 (ESV)**

It is better to serve a simple meal with a good attitude than an exotic meal with a bad one. Ladies, keep hospitality simple. The problem is our idea of hospitality is a dinner party where we try to impress and entertain. We clean the house like it is on the parade of homes. We over-work. We over-plan. We over-stress. If that is what hospitality involved, nobody would want to show it. Biblical hospitality is simple food, in a warm and welcoming home that is not perfectly clean. It is caring about people, listening to their hurts and praying with them when they are weak.

Please don't think of hospitality as a burden to bear. It is a privilege to cherish. Why is hospitality a privilege? Some of the best spiritual good we can do for other people takes place when we are hospitable and have people over to our homes. You have no idea the life-changing spiritual good that often happens when we open our homes and share a meal. A meal is when people are finally real with one another and open to hear one another. I know people who found their hearts soft to the gospel after experiencing hospitality and they became Christians. I know others who grew by leaps and bounds spiritually when they were repeatedly welcomed into a healthy Christian home. Those who are in the

kitchen — which is often the lady of the home — please see your home and your kitchen as a powerful tool for the kingdom of Christ. You can do immense spiritual good for other people through the hospitality you offer in your home. Do not grumble when given the opportunity to do this spiritual good. Be filled with joy for the privilege of doing this spiritual good.

God calls us to extend hospitality to visitors.

Let brotherly love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. Hebrews 13:1–2 (ESV)

In Romans, we learned the importance of pursuing hospitality, not just letting it happen. In 1 Peter, we learned the importance of loving one another in the church by showing hospitality to everyone in our church family, not just our family and close friends.

In Hebrews we see hospitality as we often understand it, as something we extend to visitors.

Hospitality is one of the best ways to tangibly express our love. The root reason for hospitality in Hebrews is the same root reason given in 1 Peter. Going out of our way to show hospitality is the tangible way we love people. The writer of Hebrews says, *let brotherly love continue*. Keep loving people like they are family. How do we love one another like family? Have people in your home. We have visitors in our homes. Out of love God opened his home to us while we were strangers. In love, we should do the same and open our homes to strangers.

Hospitality to visitors may carry an unexpected blessing. The writer of Hebrews said you never know who you may welcome into your home when you

show hospitality to a stranger. It may be an unexpected honored guest, like an angel.

When he talked about entertaining angels, he was referring to the time when Abraham showed hospitality to three guests in Genesis 18. It turned out two of them were angels and one of them was Jesus before he took on flesh and was born in Bethlehem. I bet Abraham looked back and was thankful he offered hospitality to visitors, especially when it resulted in him having a meal with Jesus.

The point is we should be ready and eager to show hospitality to visitors. We never know who may come in the door. Remember why we have a desire to go out of our way for visitors. Our willingness to extend hospitality comes from wanting to love people, like Jesus loved us.

Hospitality to visitors means planning for the unexpected. Hospitality between church family that we talked about in 1 Peter is easier to plan. You can put in on the calendar. Hospitality to visitors is harder to plan. To be ready for this kind of hospitality we need to plan ahead for the unexpected.

The easiest way to apply this is when we cook food, always cook more than enough food for you family. That way, you are always ready to have people over for dinner. If you don't have an unexpected guest, the good news is you have leftovers, which make a great lunch. On a Sunday, come to church prepared to invite guests over to your home after church. Even if you are simply serving sandwiches, have enough lunch meat and bread to serve a few more people than your family members. Be prepared to bless people by unexpectedly inviting them to your home.

Hospitality is a requirement for church leaders.

Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach... 1 Timothy 3:2 (ESV)

For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. Titus 1:7-8 (ESV)

In 1 Timothy and Titus, Paul gave the qualifications for elders and church leaders. In both lists, an essential quality of church leaders is hospitality. Why is this a requirement? Most of us wouldn't think of having people over to our homes for food as an essential requirement for leadership. Let me give two reasons.

First, in 1 Peter and Hebrews, we learned that the tangible expression of love for God's people is showing hospitality to God's people. You do not want a leader that is not showing hospitality to the people of the church because that means that person doesn't truly love the people of the church. You always want leaders who are born again so they love those in the church and that love shows up as hospitality toward visitors and people in the church.

Second, church leaders provide an example for the rest of us to follow. The old adage is, "The speed of the leader is the speed of the team." If the leaders in the church are unwilling to show hospitality, don't expect the people of the church to show hospitality. If people in the church are not hospitable to visitors and to one another in the church, the result is there is a lack of feeling of love in the church. The church will be sick instead of healthy.

Hospitality is what happens when God's love for us flows out of us.

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know

God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 1 John 4:7–11 (ESV)

1 John is exceedingly clear that when we come to Christ for forgiveness and are born again, one of the immediate evidences of new birth is love for our brothers and sisters in Christ. Church should be a warm family environment where we feel love from our brothers and sisters in Jesus. That is evidence of new birth.

1 Peter and Hebrews both tell us that one of the primary ways that love is displayed is through the hospitality that we extend to our brothers and sister in Christ and visitors.

Hospitality is everyone's job.

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ... Ephesians 4:11–12 (ESV)

It is easy to leave this morning thinking hospitality is the pastor's job. He is paid to be hospitable. It is the church leaders' jobs. They are required to be hospitable. It is easy to leave today thinking hospitality is the job of a married couple because you are single. It is easy to think hospitality is for people with nicer homes or more money because you already have enough mouths to feed in your home.

This tells us all excuses are off. Hospitality is everyone's job. The only way CrossWinds will be a healthy church where people will stay and grow in Christ is when all of us are committed to loving people by taking hospitality seriously. Too many times we leave the church with just sermon information. Today needs to be

different. We need to leave with sermon transformation. We must make a decision to change the way we live and put hospitality into our schedule. Remember hospitality is not a luxury in the Christian life. It is a necessity of the Christian life.

What are the benefits of showing hospitality?

While the Bible commands hospitality, there are many practical benefits of hospitality that makes us realize it is not as burdensome as it may look.

Hospitality develops spiritual maturity.

Hospitality teaches us to die to ourselves and care for the needs of others instead of just ourselves. Philippians 2:3-4 tells us to become more like Jesus. That means to be humble and not look only to our interests but to look to the interests of others and consider them more important than our own. Hospitality teaches us to die to ourselves and care about the needs of others. Going out of your way to show hospitality is a great way to uproot the sinful selfishness that is alive and well in all of us. Hospitality teaches us to care for and sacrifice for others like Jesus sacrificed himself for us.

Hospitality teaches us to be friendly instead of isolated. By nature, we like to isolate ourselves. We want people to go out of their way to be welcoming to us, but we don't want to go out of our way to be welcoming to them. Many people leave church and are depressed that nobody went out of their way to talk to them. Nobody asked them over for a meal.

Biblical hospitality teaches us to be friendly. It teaches us to stop worrying about receiving dinner invitations and start giving dinner invitations. In church, a

person that isolates himself and doesn't extend hospitality can feel the church is a cold and unwelcoming place. People in church who open their homes and their lives by extending hospitality will always have more friends than they know what to do with. You always have friends when you open your home to be friendly and hospitable.

Hospitality benefits the family.

Hospitality teaches children to use their home and life to care for others. Our children are growing up in a narcissistic society. Everything they are taught is about focusing on themselves and their needs. This culturally engrained selfishness is antithetical to the life of a Christian. How can children learn to live differently? Children learn by watching. They learn by watching their parents be self-forgetful and open-hearted toward others in their church and toward visitors. One of the best things we can do for our children is to teach them to be hospitable when they experience their parents being hospitable to others, especially others in their church family. If we do not teach this Christ-honoring lifestyle to our children by letting them see their parents live it, it will be painful for children to unlearn our bad example later in life as they mature in Christ and learn the importance of extending hospitality to others.

Hospitality provides parents spiritual support for their children.

Opening our homes in love and care for others also helps parents raise their children to be more passionate for Jesus. When we open our homes to other Christians our children develop friendships with other godly men and women that

we invite into our homes. They become an extra voice that reinforces what we are teaching our children about Jesus.

My mother was a hospitality queen. At church, she tried to have every visiting speaker and missionary over the home for a meal. That gave me lots of opportunities to rub shoulders with godly men and women. One visitor my mother had to lunch was Christy Wilson. He was the missions professor at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. He was speaking in our evening service, so he offered to give me a ride back to church. I was a little kid. I still remember before he started the car he stopped and prayed for a safe trip and for the evening service we were about to drive to. I never forgot that moment or the way he prayed. There was a depth to his prayers I was not used to experiencing. He prayed for me and for the evening service. In that brief encounter, he taught me about prayer and gave me an example to follow of a real, caring, godly Christian academic. I would have never experienced that time with him if my mother hadn't gone out of her way to show hospitality and use her kitchen to bless a Christian visitor.

Hospitality benefits the church.

Hospitality shatters cliques and an ingrown church mentality. When we show hospitality and invite people who are not part of our family or close friends over to our homes for dinner, it shatters the cliques that can easily develop. It helps the church feel like a big family, because it is a big family.

Hospitality puts church evangelism on steroids. When someone new comes to church, they are not just looking for a place to worship. They are

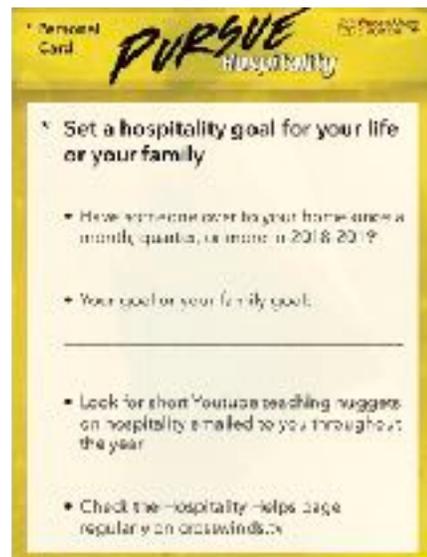
looking to see if anybody cares about them. When we open our homes to visitors and serve them a meal, that is often the first tangible way they experience the gospel. That opens the door to accepting the gospel and being born again. You can't tell me how much Jesus loves me until I know you love me.

What is our plan to improve our hospitality at CrossWinds?

There are a variety of ways we focusing on becoming more hospitable at CrossWinds.

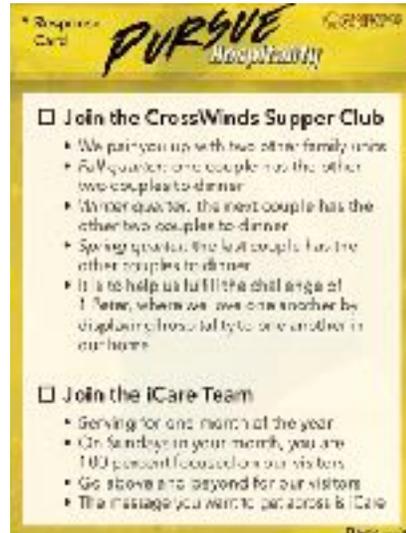
1. **Follow the continued teaching on hospitality and friendship.** I taught on hospitality this morning. You will hear more about the topics of hospitality and friendship throughout the year. Pastor Jordan and I are also preparing small Youtube teaching segments on hospitality for your inbox that we will send to you throughout the year. Make sure you keep in touch with these teaching segments.

2. **Set a hospitality goal for your life or your family.** Take out the two hospitality response cards I have in your bulletin. Pull out the one labeled "Personal Card" in the upper left corner. I am challenging each of us to set a hospitality goal for the year. If we don't set a goal, we will continue in the same lifestyle we were living when we came in the door. Maybe your goal is to have someone over to your home once a month this year. Maybe your goal is to have someone over to your home once a quarter this year. Maybe your goal is more ambitious. I



don't know. I want you to go home and prayerfully set a goal with your spouse, then keep this goal card in a prominent place to remind you through the year. Remember that if you don't set a goal, nothing different will happen in your life.

3. **Join the CrossWinds Supper Club.** Take out the card labeled, "Response Card." 1 Peter describes hospitality as something we show to one another by having people over to our homes. We are starting a Supper Club at CrossWinds. I want everyone to be involved. By signing up for the Supper Club, the office will pair you up with two other family units of people you don't usually spend time with. The goal in the fall quarter is one couple in the Supper Club will have the other two couples over for dinner. In the winter quarter, the next couple has the other two couples to dinner. In the spring quarter, the last couple has the other couples to dinner. This is a bit of a mixer. It is to help us fulfill the challenge of 1 Peter where we love one another by displaying hospitality to one another in our homes.



4. **Join the iCare Team.** While the Bible tells us to always be ready to have visitors over to our homes, the reality is that it is difficult to always be visitor-focused, especially on Sundays. This year, we are putting together an iCare team. This is a small group of people that will serve for one month of the year on Sunday morning. On the Sundays you are serving, you are 100 percent visitor-focused. When you see a visitor, you greet them. You offer to walk them and their children to classes. You offer to sit with them. You introduce them to people at church they should know. You have prepared extra food for them so you offer to have them over to your home for lunch. If that doesn't work in their schedule, that is OK. At least you prepared and offered. You contact them later in the week to check on them. The goal of the team is to communicate to people that you care.
5. **Check the Hospitality Helps page on crosswinds.tv.** We are launching a new page on our website. It is small this morning but it will continue to grow through the year. It is a place where we are putting hospitality helpful tips. It will have recipes. It will have discussion questions and other ideas on how to make hospitality easier and more effective. Be sure to check the page on our website and check this page repeatedly throughout the year.
6. **Join a Life Group.** At CrossWinds, we have Life Groups. Many of you are in a Life Group. Others of you are not part of one. I understand Life Groups don't work for everyone, but my goal is to connect more of us to Life Groups. Life Groups meet in homes, so they have an element of hospitality at their core. You will hear more about Life Groups in the next few weeks, but if you

think you might be interested in one, check the response card and let me know.

Conclusion

This morning, when we began, most of us thought of hospitality as a luxurious extra to the Christian life. Today, we learned hospitality is an essential part of everyone's Christian life. We are to go out of our way to show hospitality to one another in the church and to visitors that come in our door. Christians don't let hospitality happen. We make hospitality happen. We pursue it, like a hound chases a fox, like a cheetah chases a gazelle. My prayer is that this year we would become a church famous for our love and care for people and for the hospitality we show.



Dr. Kurt Trucksess is ordained in the Evangelical Free Church of America. He enjoys reading, writing, and time with his family. Feel free to contact him at www.Christ2RCulture.com (www.c2rc.com)

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