

## Lesson 7 – The Art of Welcoming

### Luke 15:1-2 (NIV)

*The tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”*

**“There are not strangers here, only friends who haven’t met.”**

There is power in a genuine, warm welcome! Welcoming someone brings them from being a vulnerable outsider to being connected with others.

Welcoming provides a safe environment where wrestling with matters of faith and more than just a quick conversation is acceptable.

Welcoming is opening your heart and creating a safe place of love and acceptance wherever you might be.

Welcoming is simply showing acceptance to people without any expectation of getting something in return.

### **Key ingredients for creating a welcoming environment are:**

1. Common interests
2. Being real
3. Food that is generously shared
4. A flexible plan
5. Fun and humor

### **Four aspects we need to maximize in order to be welcoming:**

1. **Your Face** –Your face is the first indicator of a welcoming spirit. Notify your face! It’s the first impression people get when they meet you. A smile and warm eye contact goes a long way in helping someone feel welcomed. Your body language can also confirm or contradict how welcoming you are. Having a relaxed, open body language can convey welcoming.
2. **Your Space** - This is the impression of openness that you show to others. Asking open ended questions encourages people to share their stories. No matter where you’re at, think of what will make the person you are connecting with FEEL most welcomed.

3. **Your Place** - Do the physical spaces you control provide a way to make people feel instantly comfortable and welcome? Sharing food and drink with others in your place can help build community.
4. **Your Grace** – Welcoming grace is willing to walk alongside others and admit you don't have all the answers and allow faith and life to be messy. This will allow you to take relationships deeper and it will allow you to let conversations about God happen naturally. Prayer is an important aspect of welcoming, but especially in the grace part. When inviting someone to spend time with you, pray before, after and during your time with them.

### **Barriers to welcoming:**

1. **Busyness** – It takes humility and intentionality to slow down and make space to welcome others. Take a good look at your schedule for a minute. What have you said “yes” to that's keeping you from taking time for people who need to know about God's love?
2. **Shallowness** - So many of us are accustomed to surface level relationships. They never get past the surface. Sometimes we lack relational depth ourselves so we are afraid of taking a risk to show anyone our vulnerability.
3. **Competitiveness** – This barrier is driven by real strong fear. Afraid we won't measure up. We develop this win or lose mentality. With this barrier, we push people away instead of welcoming them in. Competition and comparison destroy any potential for community and connection. When you compare people, it makes them resent the person you're comparing them to. Before you even start a conversation with someone, let go of the need to win or the need to be right.
4. **Defensiveness** – When we don't have a firm foundation on our identity in Christ we will be vulnerable to the barrier of defensiveness, and it will push people away quicker than any other barrier. To overcome this obstacle, I've got one word that you really need to learn...RELAX!
5. **Selfishness** –The default mode of every human being is to ask “What's in it for me?” “What am I going to get out of this?” We take things into our own hands and we look out for ourselves because we know we want what's best for ourselves. We often choose relationships on what we can get rather than on what we can give. The antidote to selfishness is to serve others.

Accept people where they are. By not accepting people where they are, we're communicating that we don't trust God to get them where he wants them to go.

One of the keys to avoid judging people is to take time to listen to them. Once you hear more of a person's story and their situation, it becomes easier to feel for them. It becomes easier to have a heart for them. A simple phrase like "Tell me more about that" creates a space for the person to feel welcome and accepted.

Welcoming is primarily the creation of a space where a stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy. In those kinds of places we experience what it means to feel valued; what it means to be known and what it means to be loved.

Your job and my job is to create a safe place to allow others to honestly explore matters of faith with you as a true friend.

You can't become a friend if you shut down the conversation before it even gets started. So allow yourself to make a friend first. Where it goes from there is between them and God. You've got to go through the art of noticing. You've got to go through the art of listening. You've got to go through the art of praying. You've got to use the tools you've been given to get to that place where they are open and you're open enough to have spiritual conversations.

Then after you have those conversations, it's up to HIM! No man can come to Him unless he is drawn by God! Let's create a welcoming environment wherever we are!