

Whatever Happened to
Fried Chicken?

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Fried Chicken?

***Is Old Time Religion Good
Enough for Me?***



Celine Sparks



Publishing Designs, Inc.
P. O. Box 3241
Huntsville, Alabama 35810

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To Abram, who grew from a boy to a man during the writing of this book. From toy trucks, stick swords and paper soldiers. Whatever happened to that?

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INTRODUCTION

My dad eats a candle from his birthday cake every year. If it didn't happen, we would be a little uneasy. That's the way it is with traditions. We hold to them tight like a candle, never realizing that the wax is melting within our grip, and they're slowly and surely slipping away from us.

It raises the question, "Whatever *did* happen to fried chicken?"

Pretty soon a celebration is a memory, a centerpiece takes up attic space, and we find ourselves droning on about what used to be to a generation that looks up from their touchscreens long enough to say, "Huh?"

This book attempts to answer the spoken and unspoken "huhs" that pop up when we look back over our shoulder, sometimes with a "what in the world were we thinking?" and sometimes with a "why did we let that go?"

Don't worry, and don't feel like you must humor me as I bore you with things you're too young to remember or too old to . . . remember. This book is not so much a chronicling of the past as a challenge to the future. Let's bury what we mourn, and resurrect what we must. Let's laugh at what we did back then, and cry because we don't do it anymore.

I never really meant for the focus of this project to be a creek bank or a plate of fried chicken any more than Jesus meant for our concern to be for a camel trying to get through the needle.

Whatever happened to fried chicken? I'm not sure, but the piece I miss most is the backbone. In some areas, we've compromised until all we have left is the wishbone. We wish somehow we could restore the fervor without repeating the failures.

It's a good idea, and far more than just a wish. Join me as we borrow from the best of our past to get to the best of our future. And if we're going to go back in time in order to move forward, let's go way back. The problem with pulling our practices from the era of

our mothers or our grandmothers is that we're a couple of thousand years off.

So we must reach past the anecdotes and pull with all our might for the antidote. When we examine, internalize, apply, and embrace God-breathed guidance and ground rules, we will get what we are seeking. Our equipment may be different from those of the filmstrip era or the paper-fan climate control, but nevertheless, we will be equipped (1 Timothy 3:16–17).

Between chapters, you will find sections titled *A Favorite Piece*. Skip over them if you like; they're not pertinent to salvation or spiritual sustenance. However, they might help a little with sanity. They are just there to prod a little laughter, a God-given blessing that we often get too busy to enjoy. God knew about endorphins before medical experts could spell them. It's why some of our most humorous memories are from campaign trails far from home, or from chilly hospital rooms in the middle of the night. God knew we would need a burst of laughter right about then in order to gear up for the next big thing.

I was actually in a hospital room when I first pondered the idea for this book. I tapped out a couple of lines as my daughter Miriam lay nearby with a ruptured appendix. It was a total shift in gears from the book underway at the time.

What I thought was an overnight stay turned into a week, and then into five additional days. Every time we turned a corner, we met a new obstacle. I prayed and it seemed the world prayed with me. Of course it wasn't the world, but the host of the redeemed.

She eventually had a temporary port put in, was treated with home health care, and on April 17, 2011, a full month after she was admitted to ER, was released from any further treatment. She was well. Hallelujah!

But during that time, *Whatever Happened to Fried Chicken?* began to take form. In cramped living quarters with very few spending quarters, memories rolled around in my mind and spilled out onto the keyboard. When I plunged into the scriptures for comfort for my

mother worries, I came up for air with extras for the pages of this book.

This was written in pajama pants and fuzzy socks which would have probably been an outrage during the fried chicken era. But here it is: the product of hardcore prayer, hand wringing and nail biting; long days and restless nights; blessed assurance and peace that passes understanding. And oh yeah—a couple of rounds of laughter that we thought were going to rupture something beyond the appendix.

Those are the things I wish for you as you read: hardcore prayer, blessed assurance, peace, laughter, and when you need it most, fuzzy socks.

Celine





Whatever Happened to Fried Chicken?

Bring Back the Hospitality

A

blue willow platter full of crispy fried chicken sat dead center on the worn enamel topped table. Four boys, one girl, and three rules were also set down before the guest arrived.

First, be on your best behavior. “Behave” is a word moms have surely used since Eve and Jochebed; one that no kid knows the meaning of exactly, but everyone can pinpoint that it has something to do with not picking your nose and waiting until later to punch your brother.

Second, the guest goes first! Children weren’t to touch a kernel of corn or the eye of a pea until the honoree, the visiting preacher, filled his plate.

Third, and most important, since the mother repeated it a half-dozen times to make sure every child understood, no one was to get seconds on chicken. It was all they had. There was only one piece per person, or as she said in those days, “a piece apiece.”



This was long before I existed, but my mother Johnnia was the little girl at the table eyeing the chicken thigh, and as the platter was passed along that night, so was the following story forever after.

Johnnia cringed as she saw that preacher reach for the chicken thigh, but *c'est la vie*. The chicken did have two thighs after all. But then the unthinkable happened, at least in her young mind. The preacher's fork made another stab at the plate to get another piece—the drumstick, the leg—and while the boys just gasped under their breath, Johnnia blurted out in protest. “There’s only a piece apiece. Right, Mother? There’s only a piece apiece!”

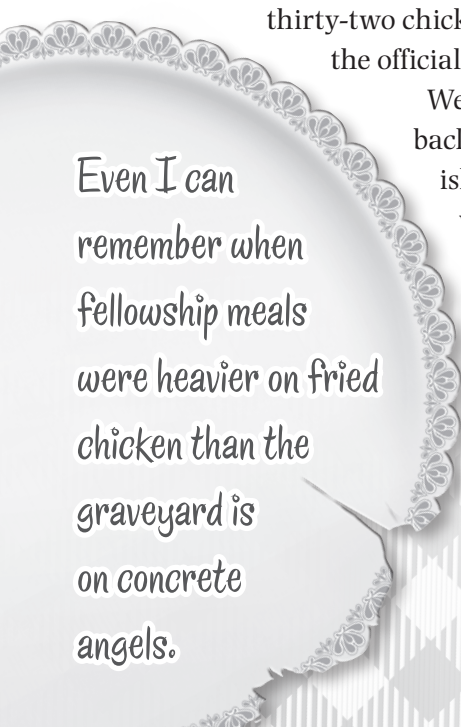
My grandmother could have kicked her under the table, but all true mothers know that this produces one universal result: “Hey! What are you kicking me for?”

Those were the days when hospitality spoke but one language: fried chicken.

What happened? Even I can remember when fellowship meals were heavier on fried chicken than the graveyard is on concrete angels. Back in that day, if you got a helping of everything as you went down the long folding tables like we do now, you would have thirty-two chicken parts on your plate. Fried chicken was the official dish of good Christians everywhere.

We didn’t even know how to spell *cholesterol* back then, but we were pretty sure it was an island down there somewhere. Now? Now we’re a health conscious society. Now we count the fat grams instead of the pieces. And now the only person that’s happy is the chicken.

But we’ll make it. As hard as this may be to believe, nowhere in the scriptures is the term *fried chicken*. It’s harder to accept than the price of



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angels.

gasoline, but it may be that the day of fried chicken ruling the religious roost is gone, never to return. We'll just have to settle for broccoli casserole and taco soup. With great difficulty, I can succumb to that as long as the chicken didn't take other things with her when she rounded that corner—things more nurturing and sustaining, more valuable, and more attached to scriptural mandate. If she did, stop that chicken! Bring back the essentials.



Continuing daily . . . from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart (Acts 2:46).

Bring Back the Fellowship!

First of all, I'm afraid that chicken strutted off with the fellowship and together-time experienced in common meals. I remember years ago the radio blaring out a song about an all-day singing and dinner on the ground. I didn't know what it meant, but I assumed it had to do with those times my mother was so concerned with having enough that she had us march in with two or three bowls each. Inevitably, there would be a pile of macaroni and cheese or au gratin potatoes in the parking lot. Mark it down; it was whatever she spent the most time preparing. Regrettably, it was dinner on the ground.

We rarely hear the words "dinner on the ground" anymore, but that's okay too, as long as we're still having it together, be it inside and on tables.

In Acts 2 we find the disciples together daily, breaking bread from house to house, eating their food with simplicity and gladness. It's the same chapter we use as a precedent for baptism, but somehow it breaks down for some of us about verse 46.

Recently a church member was talking to my husband about the number of times Christian brothers and sisters had been coming

together for meals within a short period of time. “You know, I just think you can do that too much!” he said.

I couldn’t disagree more. Too much encouragement? Too much bonding? Too much blending the lives of those who will help sustain one another through the roughest of times ahead? Too much simplicity? Too much gladness? If anything, the recent meals had been short of the mark because, while frequent, they had still missed the Acts 2 “daily” example.

Bring Back the Hospitality!

The second thing I’m concerned the chicken may have walked out with is the abundant hospitality. Our mothers and grandmothers had a knack for something more than just frying chicken. It seemed when the plate was passed around, every piece communicated the concern the cook had for taking care of those who needed it. She and the chicken worked together in that. They supported a family whose breadwinner was laid off, they supported the widow with the three boys still at home, they supported the family that was having out-of-town houseguests, and they supported the mother with the new baby. There wasn’t anything that a plate of fried chicken, and maybe an orange cake, couldn’t at least help you through.

Preachers and Wishbones

More than anything, I remember that official bird helping feed the visiting preacher. In the late seventies and early eighties, Franklin Camp taught a class for preachers every Monday in the Birmingham area. Preachers came from Montgomery, Atlanta, Tuscaloosa, Anniston, and every small town in between to fill their cups with brother Camp’s great insight into God’s holy Word. But after they filled their cups, they went to fill their plates.

When I got off the school bus on Monday afternoons, I knew what to expect. Cars would be lined down my driveway and half-way up the street, and I no sooner set foot in the yard than I could

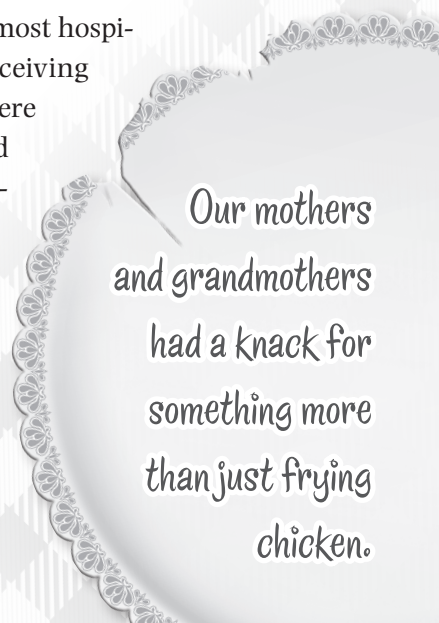
hear the laughter and fellowship. The meal my mama had made was all gone but the wishbone. But somehow those preachers lingered over empty plates because no one wanted to be the first to leave. There was too much camaraderie there, too much encouragement, too much simplicity and gladness. Some of these preachers would return to challenging circumstances, but brother Camp's Bible lessons and Mama's fried chicken could get them through another week of it.

Preaching was something Mama could do well only to the four of us. She wasn't a Greek scholar, and she didn't personally baptize a single soul. But her fried chicken and fried okra and turnip greens and squash had a huge part in helping those who took the gospel to every creature. Hospitality always does.

Hospitality Is for the "Haves"

But hospitality is for the "haves" to help the "have nots," right? Are you a "have" or a "have not"? Our house held six people—eight when the grandparents moved in. We had one bathroom, the carpet needed replacing, and the sheetrock was parting ways in a couple of places, but Mama was a "have." To repeat, you don't have to have to be a "have." You don't have to have a fancy house or a fine linen tablecloth or even a perfectly ordered den to have the gift of hospitality.

Brother Hugo McCord told of one of the most hospitable moments he had experienced on the receiving end. He went to a small clapboard house where the host, a mining family with two boys, had prepared him dinner when he was the "visiting preacher" at a gospel meeting. The dinner consisted of a bowl of mashed potatoes mixed with a couple of wieners cut in small pieces, and the dinner party sat on nail kegs (McCord 8). This family consisted



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chicken.

of “haves.” They had a home, they had an opportunity, they had a table, and they had some potatoes. Most of all, they had two boys who needed a real life lesson in how to show hospitality. I bet they remember that lesson to this day.

My husband and I, along with our first baby son, used to stay in Finger, Tennessee, with a widow named Evil Tidwell when we needed housing for the Freed-Hardeman University lectureship each February. Her first name couldn't have been more opposite



An Extra Helping

If you ever want to remember what old-school hospitality tasted like, follow this recipe:



1 hen, washed and cut up (Or select the pieces you like at the supermarket. I use a tray of drumsticks.)

2 cups buttermilk mixed with 1 teaspoon salt and $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon cayenne pepper

2 cups flour, mixed with one teaspoon pepper, 1 teaspoon salt, 1 teaspoon garlic powder, and $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon paprika

3 cups oil

Heat the oil in the skillet on medium-high. Dip each chicken piece in the buttermilk; then coat with the flour mixture and drop in the hot oil. Fry 15 minutes, and then turn, and continue to fry for another 15 minutes.

Line an antique platter with paper towels, and transfer the chicken to the platter. After the grease is absorbed, you can remove the paper towels.

If you want to get close, but still pass your next physical, put 2 tablespoons oil in a baking dish, and preheat at 350 degrees. Mix 2 cups crushed corn flakes with one teaspoon garlic salt and $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon pepper. Dip each piece in the buttermilk mixture (in above recipe), coat with the corn flake mixture, and place in baking dish. Bake for 50 minutes, uncovered, turning once.

from her sweet disposition. She had two sisters named Oval and Woodrow, which made me wonder just what her daddy had been farming along with his corn crop in those days.

Anyway, on those cold February nights we would sit up late with Mrs. Evil in a tiny room around a wood-burning stove in straight-back chairs, not one of them matching any of the others. But there were extra doses of laughter, and we rested our heads at night on pillows of peace. It was better than the Marriott. Mrs. Evil was a “have.”



As we have opportunity, let us do good to all . . . (Galatians 6:10).

It's More about Your Heart than Your House

Don't wait until your wallpaper matches your carpet and you get that faucet handle replaced to show someone hospitality. If you have a dish, if you have a table, if you have a bag of potatoes, then you are a “have.” Most of all, if you have a daughter or son who needs to learn about hospitality in vivid color, you are an especially rich “have.” You are a “have” that will one day be a “have not.” It's inevitable for all of us. It's an opportunity that's slipping away from us like butter off a hot ear of corn. Seize the moment!

I hate to say it because I stand convicted when I do, but when we try to make our house perfect to impress the company, it is ourselves we are serving and not others. Which one of us doesn't feel more comfortable in a home where we don't get whiplash from flinching every time our child brushes up against a piece of furniture or looks too closely at a knickknack?



Martha was distracted with much serving . . . (Luke 10:40).

One Thing Is Needful

Be sure you aim at your target. I think in Luke 10, Martha meant to be all about hospitality. She certainly was about much serving; she was about food and guests and hosting the first and greatest gospel preacher. But she was a little panicked about the situation, and when it didn't play out as she had pictured, stress started giving orders and hospitality jumped out the window from the bread pan.

In Christ's earthly lifetime of thirty-three years, do you know how many ordinary events did not make it into the scriptures? But God Almighty saw this little true story of a stressful kitchen episode as important enough to include for our learning. Why? Could it be that it's because He knows and loves us so well? He understood way ahead of time that two thousand years worth of those same episodes were looming for His daughters everywhere. His answer is the same today. "One thing is needful." True hospitality just doesn't stress out!

Reality Check

In John 12 we find Martha in the position of hospitality again, cooking and serving, but this time, not in a tizzy. What made the difference? Perhaps Jesus' rebuke, but Martha had also been through a sobering reality check since that last meal. She had lost Lazarus, and she had gotten him back. And there he was at the table. She could count her blessings in person, and she didn't have to count past one to know it was no longer important if the beans burned or the oil spilled.

Martha now knew more than anybody that hospitality is not about taking turns to go and see if my house is better than your house. Luke 14:12 gives us a heads up on that. Sometimes hospitality may be about buying a hamburger for the guy under the bridge. It may be about opening your home to a family that you don't even know but who came into town because a son or daughter or mother or father is in the nearby intensive care unit.

A When-It's-Convenient Thing?

“Do not forget to entertain strangers,” Hebrews 13:2 says, and I don’t think it’s talking about song and dance or ventriloquism. The English Standard Version renders a better translation: “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.” Most think this is a reference back to Genesis 18 when Abraham and Sarah were hospitable to three visitors who foretold Isaac’s birth. We can’t know for sure, but it certainly fits the bill. They were strangers, Abraham and Sarah were hospitable, and the visitors were messengers (angels).

Nice story, but pretty impractical for us, right? After all, Abraham lived life at a slower pace. We’re juggling it like a circus act on an energy drink here. Don’t kid yourself; life has always demanded more than we could give it. It has always been about making the choice to sacrifice something in order to squeeze something else in. Look at the language in this account:

Abraham *hurried* into the tent to Sarah and said, “*Quickly*, make ready three measures of fine meal; knead it and make cakes.”

And Abraham *ran* to the herd, took a tender and good calf, gave it to a young man, and he *hastened* to prepare it (Genesis 18:6–7, emphases added).

He hurried, he ran, he said “quickly!” and the young man hastened!

Now exactly how is that different from our lifestyle? It sounds way too familiar to me. We’re not commanded to be hospitable if we’re not too busy. We’re expected to be hospitable in spite of the fact that we’re busy.



... seek to show hospitality (Romans 12:13 ESV).

A Safer Place and Time

Sometimes we simply are afraid to be hospitable to strangers. We tell ourselves that it's just not safe. It's not the same as it used to be in those simpler Genesis times. We live in a society filled with crime and evil. It seems we can't trust anyone.

Hmmm. Let's take a look at that hospitality episode again in chapter 18. Exactly in what kind of society did Abraham and Sarah live? They lived a few miles across the way from a city where you could not even find ten decent people if you were hard pressed. (And Abraham was very hard pressed.)

This was a society where people would come to your door and violently beat it down if you refused to be part of their rampant gang rape. It's just a little scary for me to read about, and Abraham and Sarah lived near it. While it's hard to exactly pinpoint where Sodom was—when God annihilates a city, even the dot on the map is gone—it's pretty well accepted that it was in the Dead Sea region. Even if it had been at the southernmost tip of the sea, it would have been only thirty miles from Mamre (Vos 275).

The events of the hospitality episode and the Sodom-and-Gomorra episode didn't only take place in the same book of the Bible but the very same day. How far apart were the cities again? Well, it wasn't a strain for Abraham to see the smoke of the city by the next afternoon (Genesis 19:28).

Think we can be excused from hospitality because we live in a scary society? Try telling Abraham and Sarah that.

Err on the Doing Side

I'm not saying that we should start throwing caution to the wind, picking up hitch-hikers, and having our kids share a room with a street gang. But we need to have compassion for the displaced and act on that compassion as Abraham did. Some ways of being hospitable are safer than others, and we should seek those routes. However, sometimes we're going to find ourselves on the road from

Jerusalem to Jericho when we stumble across the beaten and helpless. As Christians, what are we going to do? Dodge by on the other side, or fully trust that God will be with us and walk right into the risk?

Can you ever really go wrong with hospitality? It's not a great feeling to know that you tried to show hospitality to someone, later to learn that person lied to you and used your kindness to support sin. However, keep this in mind. Over and over God condemns failure to help those who need it.

- Matthew 25:41–46—Then He will also say to those on the left hand, “Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was hungry and you gave Me no food . . .” “Lord, when did we see You hungry . . . and did not minister to You?” “Inasmuch as you did not do *it* to one of the least of these, you did not do *it* to Me.” And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.
- James 2:15–16—If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, “Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,” but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?
- 1 John 3:17— But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?

(See also Proverbs 28:27; 29:7; Daniel 4:27; Zechariah 7:10ff).

Not once in all of Scripture can I find Him condemning an act of helping someone who then fraudulently misuses that help. God doesn't hold us responsible for what the other guy chooses to do; he holds us responsible for what we choose to do. So if

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Abraham did.*

you err, do it on the side of hospitality. And by the way, if it's wrong to give blessings to those who misuse them, then God Himself is the chief offender.

A Birth or Death Situation

No, you really can't go wrong with hospitality, but for most of us it's a twice in a lifetime occasion. We dish it out in healthy helpings at the beginning of life and at the end. When a baby is born, we can't bring the casseroles fast enough. We somehow must think the mother is nursing twin cows instead of a six-pound infant. But even that windfall of food pales in comparison to that brought after the funeral. Mississippi songwriter Kate Campbell's *Funeral Food* nails it, "We sure eat good when somebody dies" (Campbell).

Usually between birth and death, there is this huge gap of time in which most people do the bulk of their living. It is in this space of time that we experience lean months, job losses, unexpected company, surgery, burnout, overtime, accidents, relationship crises, moving trucks—you name it! If it happens sometime between birth and death, it fits here. That fried chicken used to horn in on all of these occasions and bring a few of her friends. But when she left, she walked out with something precious.



... the words of the Lord Jesus, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).

Creative Hospitality Traits

We've just stopped tending to one another's business, and that's not always a good thing. We've forgotten how to roll out care in a pie crust and serve strength from a skillet. But many of my spiritual mothers are still quite good at this. It seems to come as natural to them as a hole in your sock, but we need to understand that it

probably isn't nature but years and years of intentional discipline and practice. We can learn from their creative hospitality traits. Here are a few of my favorites:

1. *Remember the widowers.* Most of them grew up in a generation where men did a lot of the work but very little of the cooking. They are most appreciative of a home-cooked dish, and it can go a long way in encouraging them.
2. *Multiply a blessing.* When you make homemade bread or cake, make it go further. Instead of encouraging one person, why not hit six or eight? Elderly couples, college students, widows, and caregivers cannot realistically eat a whole loaf of bread or cake, but one hefty slice can hit the spot, and it makes their day just a little sweeter to know someone was thinking of them.
3. *Take a breakfast.* Instead of the meals we usually think of, when someone is burning the candle at both ends already, it can be particularly tiresome to have to start her already jam-packed day in the kitchen. This is helpful for families with small children who are hit with an unexpected crisis, for caregivers who are adjusting to live-in parents, or just for helping church members who are hosting the visiting missionaries or guest speakers.
4. *Go simple with cheerful scents, sights, and flavors.* Young children love and need to be involved in caring. They can't cook a full-course meal, but they can pick flowers and put them in plastic bottles. They can put googly eyes on apples and oranges or wrap a ribbon around a candy bar or a pack of gum. What a day-changer this can be for a hall full of nursing home residents, and a life-changer for the impressionable little flower-picker.
5. *Check in online.* Use the social networks online to tend to other people's business in a good way. On any given day or night, you might find the following as a status. I found all of these in a few minutes.

- What a day!
- Today is my mommy's birthday and also her anniversary. Twenty-seven years. Just wish she and Daddy weren't so sick!
- Mom was released from the hospital to my sister's house. She will have to have someone with her 24/7 . . . and be very careful!
- Today was just X-rays (OW! Why do those things have to hurt so much?)
- Shelby's a brute . . . kid can pull a Christmas tree down on herself with one hand! Not bad for a 16-month-old, but not wonderful for Mom, who has put the tree together now three times . . .

Pick one, any one, and jumpstart hospitality again. But if you pick the "what a day!" person, you might want to ring the doorbell and leave a dish and a note on her doorstep. I don't think she has time for company today. And if you pick the person with the tree knocked over, you might want to carry paper plates.

Maybe you don't have time to kill the calf like Abraham did even if you hurry, but there's nothing wrong with picking up a pound of barbecue, a bag of fruit, or even a dozen doughnuts. (Well, there may be something wrong with that one if you don't share just one with me.)

The Short List

How many times have you heard that we can't earn our salvation? It's true; we're not capable. We can only respond to Christ's love in obedience. But while our works are inadequate to buy pardon, isn't it soothing to know that God values them, as measly as they may be? It's interesting what begins to stand out on our resume to God as we near and pass that three-score mark and possibility of widowhood:

Do not let a widow under sixty years old be taken into the number, and not unless she has been the wife of one man, well reported for good works: if she has brought up children, if she has lodged strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, if she has relieved the afflicted, if she has diligently followed every good work (1 Timothy 5:9–10).

I can't help but notice that the things named in verse 10 line up heavily on the side of simple hospitality. I also notice that the lowliest act of all, washing the saints' feet, makes the short list. It takes me back to John 13. There they were, twelve friends with disgusting feet, and Jesus, Son of God, Prince of Peace, Lord of lords, and Savior of all became Washer of Feet. It is here, in the lowliest act of hospitality, and it is only here in all of Scripture that Jesus said, "I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you" (John 13:15).

So in God's list of important traits for the three-score lifetime, we have:

1. Bringing up children.
2. Lodging strangers.
3. Washing feet.
4. Relieving the afflicted.

If she has brought up children, if she has lodged strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, if she has relieved the afflicted.

—1 Timothy 5:10

And I'll just imagine that if she were living today, she could fry up a mighty big skillet of chicken, too.



*You might
want to ring the
doorbell and leave a
dish and a note on
her doorstep.*



1. What other scriptures, besides Acts 2, reflect the idea that first-century Christians were doing a lot of eating together?
2. Is there ever a time when it is unsafe to help someone who needs it? How is it ever not worth the risk? What cautions can be put in place while still meeting the needs of those in crisis?
3. What act of hospitality has been done for you that stands out in your memory? What was going on at the time for you, and how did your life circumstances affect your appreciation of that act of kindness?
4. What events between birth and death that weren't mentioned in this chapter are good opportunities for us to horn in on someone's business with a little hospitality?
5. Go on facebook this week and find the status of a local friend that hints to you that this person could use a dish of encouragement. Bake it and take it, or if it works better for you, pick it up and take it.
6. Spend fifteen minutes and write down five statuses of that kind. Bring them to share with others; then put them on your fridge to remind you of the overlooked times when someone needs a little friendship and hospitality.
7. Consider a person you know who is like the woman in 1 Timothy 5:9. We often reflect on the Proverbs 31 woman, but this is her New Testament counterpart. Take a few minutes to honor that widow this week. You can split the dish from number 5 and take it to her or make a lunch date to a favorite place or invite

her to drop by for coffee and cake. If you're pressed for time this week, just bring the treat when you see her at church.

8. Feet washing is not so needed now as it was in New Testament times and locations, but what equivalent act of lowly, dirty, and necessary service can we do for others today?
9. John 13:15 is the only place Jesus used the word *example*. However, aren't there other instances when He portrayed lowly service? Name two, with Bible references.



A Favorite Piece

And speaking of the Marriott . . .

Oversized lush chairs await me beneath stained glass domes where beautiful people mingle. That's the way it looks on the commercial. We have a different experience up close.

We recently were privileged to secure a room in probably the most exorbitant hotel in Tennessee—one of those that has an entire forest in the middle of it with waterfalls and the Parthenon. We didn't even mean to go hiking, and thought that it was a speaking convention.

When we finally got past the jungle and into an actual hallway, we found there had been a mix-up, and we had a room with one bed instead of two. Since this was a luxury hotel with many amenities, we thought one of those might be to switch your room if it was the wrong one. In the words of Tweety Bird, we “tawt wrong.” However, they would be glad to provide a rollaway bed, except . . . they didn't have



any left. They do know there are six people in our family, right? And that two of our kids brought a friend?

Somehow, I found it quite humorous in the middle of the night that my husband and I were hanging on to the sides of a twin air mattress to keep from rolling off every time the other person moved, and we were paying three hundred dollars to do this. The only thing worse than trying to sleep in this arrangement is, as my husband let me know, trying to sleep with a person who is laughing hysterically and trying to take pictures.

Everyone else in our group had a grand time. They had balcony windows and were jumping on their beds. Don't attempt it with an air mattress. One of them came running up to us and said, "Guess what? They gave us the wrong room, and we have a huge living room, a kitchen, four beds, and a fold-out couch!"

At this same hotel, my husband decided the one amenity he would use was the safe. So he locked all the money he had left in it, along with a check that belonged to someone else. The money accommodations, I will say, worked much better than the people ones, and the money was so secure that no one bothered it the entire stay, including my husband who didn't even open the safe

before checkout, and was halfway home before he made one sudden realization and fourteen phone calls.

Just between the sentences, "We will never do this again," and, "Next time we will sleep in the car," I reminded my husband that it was really much better than that time in Birmingham.

I arrived there a day ahead of him. It was supposed to be one of the grandest hotels in the city, but it was just about over for me when I first arrived, and a gigantic sewer rat, the kind that takes over cities in movies, ran across the portico. I had never seen one of these on

*I looked at him
over the top of an
awkward stack
supported by my belt
and hip bone, and
said, "I got this."*

the loose outside of a TV set, and I planned right then and there never to see one again if I could help it.

It was against my religion to pay fifteen dollars for parking, but after calling my husband, he told me to do it for safety reasons. My sister's husband, who also arrived the next day, had strong objections as well, so he ran out every two hours in his pajamas, walked two blocks, and put fifty cents in a parking meter.

After forking over fifteen dollars, I sure wasn't about to pay an additional fee for a bellhop, so I looked at him over the top of an awkward stack supported by my belt and hip bone, and said, "I got this." Then I dragged the rest of it and plopped it down next to an out-of-service elevator. I am not kidding. They never show this part on the commercial.

It's not that I minded going up the stairs, but I just couldn't get everything in one load, and I was afraid the head sewer rat was going to carry away the second load while I was gone with the first. Whereas other people have manageable luggage with sturdy shoulder straps and wheels, I had a hot pink plastic tub with a duct-tape secured lip. Providence kicked in when I spotted my neighbor who was at a chiropractor's convention in the same hotel, and he helped me up the stairs with my cargo.

Why does this stuff happen to me? Do upscale hotel operators meet once a year, randomly select a name, and unanimously decide to forever ban that person from having a four-star experience? If they have some kind of drawing, I won big!

In April of 2011, our power had been out for a week after tornadoes ripped through Alabama. My daughter's softball team had organized a trip to Nashville, and I had but one thought: a warm shower. I didn't care who won the ballgame. I didn't care if she got to be the starting catcher. I was consumed with the thought of a climate-controlled room with electric lamps and a hair dryer. I couldn't wish away the innings fast enough.

When I finally arrived at the hotel, here is what they had to say, "We don't have a reservation for you."

“But I made it ten days ago.”

“Nope. Sorry. Nothing here.”

“You’re telling me I don’t have a room?”

“There are no rooms. You see, tornadoes damaged much of Alabama and they have no power, and so we’re completely full, and—”

“I know about it. Why is it that every single family on this softball team has a room—every single person but me?”

“Oh, here it is.”

Huge sigh of relief.

“Yes, right here. Celine Sparks. It’s for next Tuesday.”

And those of us who have tried our luck on the website where they pick out a room for you at a surprise hotel, know to leave that alone. My friends Keith and Brenna got a cute little one with twin beds . . . on their honeymoon.

So just where *are* those oversized lush chairs? I may need to collapse on one when I see the fee for in-room bottled water.