

The Christian Home, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 11: The Home Open to Others: Hospitality and Witness

1 Peter 4:8–10; Romans 12:9–13

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

First Peter 4:8–10 and Romans 12:9–13 turn the Christian home outward, and the teacher should help students recover a vision of hospitality that much of the modern church has lost. The doctrinal core is that the home is not merely a private refuge but a base for love and ministry, and that hospitality is a direct command of God, not an optional gift for the naturally outgoing. Several truths anchor the lesson. Earnest love comes first and is the foundation of everything ('above all, keep loving one another earnestly'); biblical hospitality is the love of strangers, the opening of one's home and life even to those who cannot repay, and it is to be done 'without grumbling,' cheerfully rather than grudgingly; and everything we have, including our homes, is a stewardship of God's grace to be used in serving others. Paul adds the marks of a genuinely loving community and twice presses hospitality as something to be actively sought.

The teacher should distinguish biblical hospitality from mere entertaining, because the confusion paralyzes many. Entertaining aims to impress, requires a clean house and an impressive meal, and tends to include only those who will reciprocate. Hospitality aims to love, welcomes people into real (imperfect) life, and gladly includes those who cannot repay, the lonely, the stranger, the struggling, the new. Peter's 'without grumbling' exposes the real barriers: hospitality is inconvenient and costly, and God commands that we welcome people anyway, and gladly. The teacher should name the common obstacles (perfectionism, fear, busyness, cost, the love of privacy) honestly and lovingly, since most students feel them.

This lesson aims to form disciples whose love spills past their own walls. It calls Christians to open their homes as an overflow of the love they have received, and it lifts that ordinary act, sharing a meal, taking someone in, into its true significance: the open home is one of the most powerful instruments of witness and of building the family of God. People who would never enter a church building will sit at a believer's table, and the love they encounter there can do what no argument can. This anticipates Lesson 12, where the church is unveiled as the household of God; the open home is where that family is knit together and where outsiders are first drawn in. The disciple being formed here is someone whose home has become a harbor with the lights on, a place where love is practiced, strangers are welcomed, and the gospel is made visible across a table.

Question 1

Student Question:

Peter writes, "Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:8), placing love first, before he ever mentions hospitality or serving. Why does Peter make earnest love the foundation of everything else, and what does it mean that love 'covers a multitude of sins'?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Peter sets the order deliberately: 'Above all, keep loving one another earnestly,' and only then does he speak of hospitality and service. Love is the foundation; hospitality and service are love in action. The teacher should stress this order, because hospitality severed from love quickly degenerates into anxious performance or social obligation. The point is never the meal; it is the love the meal expresses.

The word 'earnestly' pictures love that is stretched out, strenuous, exerted, like a muscle straining. This is not the easy fondness we feel toward agreeable people but a love that works, that keeps going when it is hard, that is willing to be inconvenienced. 'Keep loving' adds the note of perseverance; this is love sustained over time, not a momentary feeling. Christian community is built on this kind of durable, effortful love.

'Love covers a multitude of sins' is drawn from Proverbs 10:12 and is rich with meaning. It does not mean love ignores sin or excuses wrongdoing, but that love is willing to forgive, to overlook offenses, to refuse to broadcast and rehearse the faults of others. In any community where people live closely, there will be friction, slights, and failures; love covers these rather than exposing and exploiting them. A community without this covering love tears itself apart over petty offenses.

Apply it to the home and church alike. The reason we can open our homes to imperfect people (and why imperfect people can bear to be welcomed) is that love covers a multitude of sins. Hospitality requires this covering love, because to welcome real people is to welcome their faults along with them, and to be welcomed is to risk our own being seen. Love makes the welcome possible.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Love as the foundation; hospitality and service as love in action
- 'Earnestly': strenuous, exerted, persevering love, not easy fondness
- 'Covers a multitude of sins': love forgives and overlooks, not excuses
- Covering love as essential to community where people live closely
- Love making the welcome of imperfect people possible

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Peter make earnest love the foundation before hospitality?
- What does it mean to love 'earnestly,' and how is that more than fondness?

- How does love 'cover' sins without excusing them?

Question 2

Student Question:

Peter calls for love that is 'earnest,' a word picturing love stretched out and strenuous, not casual or convenient. Where is your love for others (in your church, your neighborhood, your family) more polite than earnest? What would it look like to love someone strenuously, including bearing with their faults rather than keeping a record of them?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-application turns 'earnest' love inward. Much of our love, if we are honest, is polite rather than earnest: friendly enough at a distance, but unwilling to be stretched, inconvenienced, or troubled. Earnest love costs something; it shows up, bears with, forgives, and keeps going when feelings fade. The question invites students to locate where their love has settled for politeness.

Help students see the specific arenas: the church member they find difficult, the neighbor they keep at arm's length, the family member whose faults they quietly catalog. Earnest love in these places looks like moving toward people rather than away, choosing to overlook the small offense, refusing to keep a ledger of wrongs. The question deliberately ties earnest love to 'love covers a multitude of sins,' pressing toward the costly grace of bearing with others.

Move toward one concrete expression. Loving someone strenuously this week might mean a deliberate act of kindness toward a difficult person, a choice to let go of a grievance, or simply showing up for someone when it is inconvenient. Invite each student to name one relationship where their love needs to move from polite to earnest, and one step in that direction.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Polite love versus earnest, costly love
- Earnest love that bears with faults rather than recording them
- Moving toward difficult people rather than away
- One concrete step from polite to earnest love

Discussion Prompts

- Where is your love more polite than earnest?
- What would it look like to love a difficult person strenuously?
- Whom is God calling you to bear with rather than keep score against?

Question 3

Student Question:

Peter commands, "Show hospitality to one another without grumbling" (1 Peter 4:9). Biblical hospitality (literally 'love of strangers') is more than entertaining friends; it is opening one's home and life to others, even those who cannot repay it. Why does God command hospitality, and why does He specifically add 'without grumbling'?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The Greek word for hospitality, *philoxenia*, literally means 'love of strangers.' This is crucial, because it distinguishes biblical hospitality from what we usually call entertaining. Entertaining invites friends who will reciprocate, aims to impress, and requires everything to be just right. Hospitality opens the door to others, including those who cannot repay, and aims not to impress but to love. The teacher should draw this distinction clearly, because the confusion between the two is what paralyzes so many would-be hosts.

Hospitality is a command, not a suggestion or a spiritual gift reserved for the naturally outgoing. Throughout the New Testament it is expected of all Christians (Romans 12:13; Hebrews 13:2; 1 Timothy 3:2 even makes it a qualification for elders). The early church spread largely through homes (Acts 2:46), and welcoming strangers was so central that Hebrews recalls those who 'entertained angels unawares.' To neglect hospitality is to neglect a plain command of God.

Now the convicting phrase: 'without grumbling.' God knows hospitality is inconvenient. It costs money, time, and energy; it disrupts our privacy and exposes our mess. So He does not merely command that we do it but that we do it cheerfully, without the inner muttering and resentment that can sour the whole act. Grudging hospitality blesses no one; the guest feels the burden of being a burden. God commands a glad welcome, the kind that makes people feel wanted, not tolerated.

Help students see that 'without grumbling' is itself a heart issue. The cure for grumbling is not gritting the teeth but recovering the why: we welcome others because we ourselves have been welcomed by God, taken in as strangers and made family. Hospitality flows from gratitude. When we remember how freely we were received, the grumbling gives way to joy.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- *Philoxenia* ('love of strangers') versus mere entertaining
- Hospitality as a command for all Christians, not a gift for the few
- The early church spreading through open homes (Acts 2:46; Hebrews 13:2)
- 'Without grumbling': cheerful welcome, not grudging tolerance
- Hospitality flowing from gratitude for having been welcomed by God

Discussion Prompts

- How is biblical hospitality different from entertaining?
- Why does God add the words 'without grumbling'?

- How does remembering God's welcome of us cure our grumbling?

Question 4

Student Question:

Many things keep us from opening our homes: the fear that it is not nice enough, the cost, the inconvenience, the desire for privacy, simple busyness. Which of these most holds you back? What would it take to move past it and open your home to someone this month, not perfectly, but genuinely?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-application names the real barriers, because hospitality usually fails not from lack of conviction but from these practical obstacles. The question lists the common ones: the fear that the home is not nice enough, the cost, the inconvenience, the desire for privacy, and simple busyness. Most students will recognize at least one as their particular hindrance.

Address the chief paralyzer, perfectionism, directly. Many never open their homes because they are waiting for the house to be impressive enough, the meal elaborate enough, the moment convenient enough, and that moment never comes. But hospitality is not entertaining; it does not require a spotless home or a gourmet meal. A simple meal in an imperfect home, offered in love, is true hospitality. People are blessed far more by being welcomed than by being impressed, and a lived-in home can actually put guests more at ease.

Help students counter their specific barrier. The busy can build hospitality into existing rhythms (one extra place at an ordinary dinner). The cost-conscious can keep it simple (soup and bread feed a guest as well as a feast). The privacy-loving can start small and discover the joy. The fearful can lower the bar from 'impressive' to 'welcoming.' Invite each student to name the barrier that most holds them back and one realistic way to open their home to someone this month, genuinely rather than perfectly.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Naming the real barriers: cost, inconvenience, privacy, busyness, perfectionism
- Perfectionism as the chief paralyzer of hospitality
- A simple meal in an imperfect home as true hospitality
- People blessed by being welcomed, not impressed
- One realistic step to open the home this month

Discussion Prompts

- Which barrier most holds you back from opening your home?
- How does distinguishing hospitality from entertaining free you?
- What is one realistic way to welcome someone this month?

Question 5

Student Question:

Peter continues, “As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace” (1 Peter 4:10). How does seeing ourselves as ‘stewards’ of what God has given, our homes, resources, time, and gifts, change the way we think about using them for others rather than only for ourselves?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Peter grounds service in stewardship: ‘As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace.’ Two ideas stand out. First, everything we have is ‘received’; our homes, abilities, resources, and time are gifts from God, not achievements we own outright. Second, we are ‘stewards,’ managers of what belongs to Another, entrusted with these gifts for the purpose of serving others.

This reframes how we think about our possessions and homes. A steward asks not ‘how can I use this for myself?’ but ‘how does the Owner want this used?’ The home is not ultimately ours to hoard but a resource God has entrusted to us partly for the blessing of others. The same is true of our cooking, our spare room, our free evening, our particular skills. ‘God’s varied grace’ pictures a rich diversity of gifts distributed across the church, each meant to be poured out for the rest.

Draw out the dignity and the accountability of stewardship. Dignity, because even ordinary gifts (a table, a meal, a listening ear) become significant when offered as stewardship of God’s grace; there are no insignificant servants. Accountability, because stewards answer to the Owner for how they used what was entrusted to them. The question is not whether we have gifts to steward (‘each has received a gift’) but whether we are using them for others or only for ourselves.

The teacher can connect this to hospitality specifically. To open the home is to steward one of the most basic gifts God gives, and the lesson presses every student to see their home and resources as held in trust for the good of others, not merely for private comfort.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Everything ‘received’ from God, not owned outright
- Believers as stewards managing God’s gifts for others
- The home and resources held in trust, not for hoarding
- ‘God’s varied grace’: diverse gifts meant to be poured out
- The dignity and accountability of stewardship

Discussion Prompts

- How does seeing yourself as a steward change how you use what you have?
- What does it mean that even your home is held in trust from God?
- What gift has God given you that is meant to serve others?

Question 6

Student Question:

Everything you have, your home, your table, your skills, your time, was given by God and is meant to be stewarded for others, not hoarded. What is one specific resource or gift God has given you that you could begin using to serve and welcome others this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-application makes stewardship concrete. The principle that everything is received and held in trust becomes real only when a student identifies an actual resource and an actual way to deploy it for others. The question asks for one specific gift, the home, the table, a skill, time, and one specific way to begin using it.

Help students take inventory without comparison. The temptation is to think ‘others have more to offer.’ But God has given each ‘a gift,’ and the church needs the varied grace distributed among all its members. One person’s gift is a warm table; another’s is a practical skill to lend; another’s is time to sit with the lonely; another’s is a spare room for someone in need. The point is to find one’s own gift and use it, not to envy another’s.

Move toward one concrete commitment for the week. Encourage something specific and doable: inviting a particular person to a meal, offering a skill to someone who needs it, opening an evening to a lonely neighbor. The aim is to convert the principle of stewardship into a single, real act of service that begins to turn the home and its resources outward.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Identifying a specific resource or gift to steward
- Taking inventory without comparing oneself to others
- Every believer given a gift the church needs
- One concrete act of service this week

Discussion Prompts

- What specific resource or gift has God entrusted to you?
- How could you use it to serve or welcome someone this week?
- What keeps you from offering it, and how might you begin?

Question 7

Student Question:

Paul fills out the picture: “Let love be genuine ... Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor ... Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality” (Romans 12:9–13). What do these marks of genuine love reveal about the kind of community God intends His people to be, and how is the open home a base from which much of this love flows?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Romans 12:9–13 paints a portrait of the community God intends His people to be, and hospitality sits naturally among its marks. ‘Let love be genuine’ (literally, without hypocrisy, unmasked, real) sets the tone: the love that follows is to be authentic, not performed. From there Paul piles up the marks: brotherly affection, outdoing one another in showing honor, contributing to the needs of the saints, and seeking to show hospitality. This is a community of warm, active, mutual love.

Draw out a few of these marks. ‘Outdo one another in showing honor’ pictures a kind of holy competition, each trying to honor the other more, the opposite of the world’s competition for the top spot. ‘Contribute to the needs of the saints’ makes love practical and material, meeting real needs, not just offering warm feelings. And ‘seek to show hospitality’ (the next question will develop ‘seek’) gathers it all around the open home and table.

Show how the open home is a base from which much of this love flows. It is hard to honor, serve, and meet the needs of people you never share life with. The home is where genuine love becomes concrete: where the lonely are included, the struggling are fed, the new are welcomed, and the bonds of the church family are formed over shared meals and unhurried evenings. Much of the ‘one another’ life of the New Testament happens most naturally around a table.

Help students see the kind of church this describes, a family marked by genuine, active, sacrificial love, not a collection of strangers who attend the same services. The open home is one of the chief means by which a church becomes that kind of family, which is exactly the vision Lesson 12 will complete.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- ‘Genuine love’ (without hypocrisy) as the tone of the community
- The marks of love: affection, outdoing in honor, meeting needs, hospitality
- ‘Outdo one another in showing honor’ as holy competition
- Love made practical and material in meeting needs
- The open home as the base from which ‘one another’ love flows

Discussion Prompts

- What kind of community do these marks of love describe?
- How does the open home make this ‘one another’ love concrete?

- Where could your church grow in genuine, active love?

Question 8

Student Question:

Paul says to 'seek' to show hospitality, to go looking for opportunities to welcome and honor others. Who, specifically, is God placing on your heart to welcome, honor, or serve, the lonely, the new person at church, a struggling neighbor, someone different from you? What is one concrete step toward welcoming them?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-application turns on a single word: Paul says to 'seek' to show hospitality. The word implies pursuit, going after opportunities to welcome and honor others rather than waiting passively for them to arise. Hospitality, biblically, is not reactive but intentional; we look for people to welcome.

Help students move from the general to the specific by naming actual people. The question lists candidates: the lonely, the new person at church, a struggling neighbor, someone different from us. Often the people most in need of welcome are precisely those outside our existing circles, the visitor no one talked to, the widow who eats alone, the family new to town, the coworker far from home. 'Seeking' hospitality means noticing these people and moving toward them on purpose.

Press gently on the phrase 'someone different from you.' It is easy to extend hospitality only to those like us, who are comfortable and likely to reciprocate. But biblical hospitality, the love of strangers, deliberately crosses lines of age, background, status, and familiarity. The gospel itself is the welcome of strangers into God's family, and our hospitality images that welcome most clearly when it reaches beyond our own kind.

Move toward one concrete step. Invite each student to name a specific person God is placing on their heart and one concrete way to welcome, honor, or serve them, an invitation, a conversation, an act of inclusion, soon. The aim is to convert the command to 'seek' hospitality into one real pursuit this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- 'Seek' hospitality: active pursuit, not passive waiting
- Naming specific people in need of welcome
- Reaching beyond our circles to the overlooked and the new
- Welcoming 'someone different' as an image of the gospel's welcome
- One concrete pursuit of hospitality this week

Discussion Prompts

- Who specifically is God placing on your heart to welcome?
- Why does true hospitality reach beyond people just like us?
- What is one concrete step toward welcoming that person?

Question 9

Student Question:

The open Christian home is one of the most powerful instruments of witness and love the church possesses; people who would never enter a church building will sit at a believer's table, and Jesus said the world would know His disciples by their love (John 13:35). How does opening our homes in hospitality serve both the building up of the family of God and the spread of the gospel to outsiders, and why might a shared meal accomplish what an argument never could?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal block, lifting hospitality to its full significance as an instrument of witness and a means of building the family of God. The teacher should help students see that the open home is not a minor courtesy but one of the most powerful tools for the gospel a Christian possesses. People who would never enter a church building, who would resist a tract or an argument, will sit at a believer's table, and there, over a shared meal, walls come down and hearts open.

Ground this in Jesus' own words: 'By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another' (John 13:35). The world's deepest apologetic for the gospel is not a clever argument but visible, tangible love, and the open home is where that love becomes visible and tangible. When an outsider experiences genuine welcome, unhurried attention, a place at the table, and love that asks nothing in return, they encounter something the world cannot manufacture and cannot explain away. The aroma of Christ is often smelled first in a kitchen.

Show why a shared meal can accomplish what an argument never could. An argument puts people on opposite sides; a table puts them on the same side. An argument engages the head; hospitality engages the whole person and earns the right to be heard. Jesus Himself was so often at table with sinners that His critics complained of it, and it was over meals that much of His ministry unfolded. The early church followed His pattern, breaking bread from house to house as the Lord added to their number (Acts 2:46–47). Witness and welcome belong together.

Connect hospitality to the building of the family of God, not only to evangelism. The open home knits believers into a true family: it is where the lonely find belonging, where new members are folded in, where the struggling are carried, where the bonds of love that make a church a household are formed. Much of what the New Testament means by being the family of God happens around tables and in living rooms, not only in the assembly. This anticipates Lesson 12

directly: the open home is one of the chief means by which the church becomes the household of God in practice.

The teacher should also tie this to the gospel itself, in keeping with the study's convictions. Hospitality opens the door, but the goal is that those welcomed would come to know Christ, hear the gospel, and respond to it in faith, repentance, confession, and baptism. The open home is not an end in itself but a bridge, a way of loving people toward the Lord. Welcome creates the relationship in which the good news can be shared and believed.

Close this question by lifting students' eyes to the dignity of what they are being called to. To open a home is to participate in the mission of God, to build His family, and to make His love visible to a watching, lonely world. The humble act of setting an extra place at the table is, in God's hands, a powerful and beautiful thing.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The open home as a chief instrument of gospel witness
- Love as the world's deepest apologetic (John 13:35)
- A shared table accomplishing what an argument cannot
- Jesus and the early church ministering over meals (Acts 2:46–47)
- Hospitality building the family of God (bridge to Lesson 12)
- The open home as a bridge to the gospel, not an end in itself
- The dignity of participating in God's mission through welcome

Discussion Prompts

- Why is the open home such a powerful tool for the gospel?
- How can a shared meal do what an argument never could?
- How does hospitality both build the church family and reach outsiders?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across both passages, the primacy of earnest love, the command to hospitality without grumbling, the stewardship of our gifts, and the open home as a base for witness. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through these verses. What is the single truth about the open, hospitable home that you most need to carry into this coming week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The capstone gathers the lesson: the primacy of earnest love, the command of cheerful hospitality, the stewardship of all we have, and the open home as a base for witness and family. Ask each student to name one specific way Jesus is forming them, resisting vague generalities.

Different truths will land differently. One person needs to move their love from polite to earnest. Another needs to overcome perfectionism and finally open their home. Another needs to start stewarding a particular gift for others. Another needs to 'seek' out a specific lonely or overlooked person to welcome. Another needs to see their ordinary table as a tool for the gospel. Let the Spirit choose the door.

Close on the image of the harbor with the lights on. The Christian home is not a fortress to hide in but a place that takes people in, where the love we have received from God spills out onto the doorstep and draws others toward Him. Send students out resolved to open the door of their homes a little wider, trusting that the humble act of welcome is, in God's hands, a means of building His family and spreading His gospel.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Synthesis of earnest love, hospitality, stewardship, and witness
- Formation in love, in opening the home, and in seeking the overlooked
- The home as harbor, not fortress
- Ordinary welcome as a means of God's mission

Discussion Prompts

- What single truth about the open home do you most need this week?
- Where is Jesus forming you, in love, hospitality, stewardship, or witness?
- How could you open the door of your home a little wider?