



Reflections inspired by

Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations

by Robert Schnase

The five practices:

- Radical Hospitality
- Passionate Worship
- Intentional Faith Development
- Risk-taking mission and service
- Extravagant generosity

Radical Hospitality

Read: Luke 7:36-50

Reflection

It seemed over the top to those watching,
Perhaps even obscene?
The kiss of hospitality brought down to the
Reality of the grit and dust of the road.
Perfume and tears to wash away the grime,
No thought for what 'they' might think.
And 'they' were not best pleased,
Challenged the character of this giver of hospitality
And the receiver...
'If this man were a prophet',
If he knew the status of the hospitality offered.
Truth is he did know, but in his eyes
This hospitality-giver had a different status.
Suddenly the rebuke was turned around,
The challenge given –
Where was your own hospitality?
Where was your love?
See this for what it is –
Radical hospitality

Given and received in love,
Characterised by faith and forgiveness
Life-changing, uninhibited, radical hospitality.

For further thought as individuals

What are your own experiences of giving, receiving or observing radical hospitality?
What made it radical?

For further thought as Church groups

What does radical hospitality look like in your context?
How do we understand hospitality as something we both give and receive in Christ?
What prevents us from giving and receiving radical hospitality?
What might radical hospitality look like in the future for your context?

A prayer

Hospitable God, help us to understand what it means to give and receive radical hospitality. May we recognise both its power and vulnerability. Inspire us by the Holy Spirit to discern the ways in which you are calling us to radical hospitality in and through the name of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Passionate Worship

Read: Colossians 3:12-17

Reflection

Red carpet or blue,
Organ or worship band,
Chairs or pews,
Sermon or meditation,
Liturgy or extempore,
Hymns or songs?
It's easy to get passionate about these things,
How we worship,
How we meet God,
How we enable that.
But sometimes, just sometimes,
Are we more passionate about how than why we worship?
Paul urges a heart-inspired spirit of gratitude
Where God is central to our worship
So everything we are, everything we do
Is in the name of Jesus Christ.
As for the rest,
Can we 'bear with each other'?

For further thought as individuals

What are the things you are passionate about?

In what ways do you recognise passion in your own worship?

For further thought as Church groups

Why do we worship and what is worship?

What are your experiences of passionate worship? Do you also have experiences of worship that didn't feel that way?

What prevents us from experiencing or enabling passionate worship?

What might passionate worship look like in the future for your context?

A prayer

Worthy God, help us to keep our hearts focussed on you in our worship. May we recognise ways in which we can find unity that does not require uniformity, but enables all to participate in your kingdom. Inspire us parental God by the Holy Spirit to passionate worship in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Intentional Faith Development

Read: John 15:1-17

Reflection

Good pruning is an art,
You need to know the plant,
Understand its place in the seasons.
Every cut is intentional
Whether to improve shape or strength,
To get the best fruit, the most flowers,
To keep the plant healthy,
But also to keep the garden vibrant.
There are times that involves sacrifice,
Allowing one plant to die back
In order that another
May find its moment to thrive,
Bringing its own uniqueness of
Scent, colour, taste, texture, sound, shade
So that the garden bears fruit in all seasons
Whether the red dogwood stems of winter
Or the glorious summer sunflower.
Perhaps when we love one another,
Intentionally enable the potential of all,
That is when we find that together
We 'bear fruit – fruit that will last'.

For further thought as individuals

What has helped you most in your own faith development?

What of your own story might encourage others in their faith development?

For further thought as Church groups

What are the opportunities for faith development in your context?

What has worked well for people? What stories can you share?

What prevents us from being intentional about faith development, our own or that of others?

What might intentional faith development look like in the future for your context?

A prayer

Intentional God, you remind us of the importance of relationship both with you and with one another. Help us to develop not only our own faith, but the faith of others. May we be hands-in-the-earth gardeners planting seeds and nurturing them so that each can reach their full potential and bear fruit that will last. Amen.

Risk-taking mission and service

Read: Luke 10:1-12

Reflection

Organised, plan in place, controlled –
I'm that kind of person.

Scared of the unknown,

Lacking confidence,

Worried about the perceptions of others –

I can be that too.

Out there with no set plan,

No spare everything but the kitchen sink

In a ridiculously spacious travel bag,

Not sure that's me.

You see if I'm organised there's no unknown to be scared of,

If I've got a plan, I can wear it as my confidence

If I'm controlled, I can control how others see me.

But what about when I'm asked

To let go of these things?

Nervously I stand, and slowly

Shake these inhibitions from my sandals

In order to risk setting foot on the road

And herald the kingdom of God.

Anyone in need of a ridiculously spacious travel bag?

For further thought as individuals

What is your response to the idea of risk-taking?

When have you experienced God calling you or others to risk-taking mission and service?

For further thought as Church groups

What is your understanding of mission and service?

What are your experiences of risk-taking in these areas? In what ways were they positive or difficult experiences?

What prevents us from being risk-taking in our mission and service?

What might risk-taking mission and service look like in the future for your context?

A prayer

Life-changing God, you do not always call us to the easy path. We pray that as we seek to discern the mission and service that you are calling us to we do not let fear, self doubt or the need to be in control get in the way. Instead enable us to be holy risk-takers for the sake of your kingdom here on earth. Amen

Extravagant Generosity

Read: Mark 12:41-44

Reflection

Let me tell you about my friend.

She lost her job,

It made her ill,

Debts mounted,

Bailiff's came.

Money never went far enough.

I helped where I could,

Listened, enabled her voice to be heard.

Slowly, support was found.

Life was tough,

But now just about manageable.

She makes me food.

Honestly, I can't always eat it.

I have tried to stop her

Fearful because she has so little,

But cooking even the simplest meal

Is her great delight,

Sharing even greater,

So we eat and we talk

About life, about faith.

What a banquet,

What a feast
Of such humbling,
Beautiful, heart-achingly
Extravagant generosity.

For further thought as individuals

What are your own experiences of giving, receiving or observing extravagant generosity?
What was extravagant about it?

For further thought as Church groups

Where have you experienced extravagant generosity in your context?
What is important about extravagant generosity? What difference does being Christian make to how we think about it?
What prevents us from offering or receiving extravagant generosity?
What might extravagant generosity look like in the future for your context?

A prayer

God, you showed us such extravagant generosity when, out of love, you sent your Son, Jesus Christ to be our saviour. Enable us to give as extravagantly as we have received. May we be unafraid to receive the generosity of others, even when it is flawed or difficult, recognising and celebrating the true riches held within. Amen.

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