to everything there is a season series: study 4
A time to embrace: An invitation to hospitality (1 Kings 17:8-15)

## BEFORE THE LESSON

This week, your discussion will focus on an invitation to hospitality. The idea of hospitality is something we’re all familiar with, but many of us often have lots of reasons for why we may not practice hospitality all that much. And in this present season, hospitality often seems impractical and even risky. The text we will be looking at this week is all about the risks and challenges that hospitality can entail and about how the Lord can provide even when we don’t expect him to.

## STARTING THE LESSON

This series has been about times and seasons in our lives, and this week we’re discussing times of welcome and embrace – an invitation to hospitality. Hospitality can be a joy to us, but also a potential inconvenience. The Lord has a lot of affection for the hospitable and asks us many times throughout the Bible to be hospitable people, which we will see in this week’s text.

## starter question

**TIPS TO SHARE WITH LEADERS**

Take a look through the questions before you begin. Think about the group you have with you and ask the questions you think will prompt the most out of them.

Remember to thank group members who share something personal to them. Get comfortable with awkward silence.

* When was the last time you were hospitable? Think of the most recent time.
* What keeps you from being hospitable?

## Opening PrAyer

Holy Spirit, come and speak to us today. Guide our reading and discussion and use this time we spend together to grow us in our lives with you. We want to be kind hosts to you and those you love. Amen.

## Discussion questions

### Question 1

* This passage is about Elijah. Can anyone provide a quick refresh on who Elijah was in the Bible?

*Elijah was* *a prophet and a miracle worker who lived in the northern kingdom of Israel during the reign of King Ahab. Elijah defended the worship of God over that of the Canaanite deity Baal. God also performed many miracles through Elijah, raising the dead, bringing fire down from the sky, and entering heaven alive "by fire." After Elijah’s departure, his ministry was taken over by one of his closest followers, Elisha.*

**BIBLE PASSAGE REFERENCE**

**1 Kings 17:8-15**

**8** Then the word of the Lord came to him: **9** “Go at once to Zarephath in the region of Sidon and stay there. I have directed a widow there to supply you with food.” **10** So he went to Zarephath. When he came to the town gate, a widow was there gathering sticks. He called to her and asked, “Would you bring me a little water in a jar so I may have a drink?” **11** As she was going to get it, he called, “And bring me, please, a piece of bread.” **12** “As surely as the Lord your God lives,” she replied, “I don’t have any bread—only a handful of flour in a jar and a little olive oil in a jug. I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it—and die.” **13** Elijah said to her, “Don’t be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small loaf of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son. **14** For this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: ‘The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the Lord sends rain on the land.’” **15** She went away and did as Elijah had told her. So there was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family.

### Question 2

* Why does the widow expect her and her son to die?

She is unmarried with probably no money. She has very little left and there is a drought in the land (alluded to in v. 13), so she doesn’t expect to get food anytime soon. She is prepared for the two of them to starve.

### Question 3

* Why does Elijah ask to be served first?

There could be a variety of answers to this. It could be a test of faith for this widow—if she does as God asks first, she will then be provided for.

### Question 4

* What does this story remind you of from elsewhere in the Bible?

A variety of answers are possible. Some could be manna in Exodus, the fish and loaves in the New Testament, the widow’s mite in Mark 12, etc.

### Question 5

* Why does God ask for hospitality from this woman with nothing?

God can bless this widow and her son through her hospitality. She and her son are saved through the hospitality they provide Elijah. The widow’s generosity also demonstrates the fact that an abundance of wealth and resource are not needed for us to be hospitable – it is often the case that among the most generous and hospitable people in the world are also very poor, and that being wealthy does not necessarily make us generous and hospitable.

### Question 6

* What does this story tell us about the nature of God?

In this story, we see God choosing to provide for his prophet through a poor Sidonian widow – a woman of no resource who dwelt in the very land that had influenced Israel in the ways of Baal worship. God is pleased to use the poor, the humble, and the unexpected to accomplish his purposes and provide for his servants.

### Question 7

* What does this story tell us about how God values hospitality?

This story shows us that generosity and hospitality are acts of faith that depend on God and not our own resources to make them possible. It demonstrates that while God can provide for us directly if he so chooses, he often prefers for us to provide for one another, and to depend on one another – even in our own poverty – to meet each other’s needs. Hospitality is a beautiful picture of the love of God made real in human community.

### Question 8

* How can we show hospitality like the widow in this story?

*Various answers are possible, but simple acts of generosity involving food and drink and opening our own homes and lives to others in vulnerable ways especially come to mind.*

### Question 9

* Why does God call us to be hospitable?

Various answers are possible. In this story, he calls the widow to be hospitable in order to give her a new gift of faith in God. Hospitality is also a clear earthly demonstration of the love God demonstrates toward us.

### Question 10

* What does this story tell us about obedience to God’s call?

Various answers are possible. Elijah has the faith to believe God and go to Zarephath, believing he will be cared for. The widow, in faith, feeds Elijah and also receives food for herself and her son. Their obedience gave them good gifts and ultimately life, and brought glory to God, as well.

### Question 11

* How can we be hospitable in this time where it isn’t always safe to invite someone into your home?

Creativity is the order of the day. Getting out our warm clothes and inviting people on outdoor walks or backyard campfires are good options. Sending simple postcards to people in the mail unexpectedly is also another way to show hospitality and welcome. Inviting people for short spontaneous chats on Zoom, FaceTime, phone, etc. are also great ways to connect hospitably with others.

### Question 12

* What is God asking from you, upon hearing this story?

Various answers are possible. Thank those in your group who are vulnerable in answering this question. For those who don’t answer it, encourage them to share in smaller groups during prayer ministry.

##  Prayer ministry

During prayer ministry, take some time to sit quietly before God together and to ask him to show each of you ways he is inviting you to be hospitable to others. Then invite group members to share ways they sense God inviting them to be hospitable going forward. Some group members may also want to vulnerably share ways they may have failed to be hospitable or have lacked faith for God’s provision. Then, depending on the size of your group, either stay together or break into smaller groups to pray for one another. Here are some possible directions for prayer:

* Pray for opportunities to be radically hospitable, to invite new people to come to small group, to have a socially distant gathering with your isolated neighbor, etc.
* Pray for faith in God’s provision, and that we would be able to avoid a scarcity mindset.
* Leave room for specific direction in prayer from the Holy Spirit.

**Note:** This study was written as an act of service by Lizz Birkhoff.