

A Good Hostess / The Great Banquet

Carol: A poor man came to a banquet...dressed in his usual tattered clothing. He was welcomed but seated at the end of the table. He watched the delicious food being passed along but by the time the plate reached him the food was gone. Nobody was interested in talking to him. And no-one seemed to care that he got no food. After a while he decided to do something about this...

Tammy: Hello and welcome to *Women of Hope*...I'm Tammy. We're so glad that you're with us today.

Carol: It's good to be back with friends isn't it?

Tammy: Yes it is...but Carol...are you going to tell us what he decided to do?

Carol: Ok... He went away, and called on a friend who was rich and owned plenty of nice clothes and jewellery. He asked if he could borrow a nice set of clothes. His friend was happy to lend them to him.

So...dressed in his 'new' clothes, he returned to the banquet. This time he was welcomed again but taken to a seat close to the head of the table. The people near him talked to him and treated him well...they were happy to make friends with him. And my, what a lovely feast he had!

Tammy: Wow - what a difference it made to him, just because he was wearing fine clothes.

Carol: Real friends are friends no matter what you look like, or what you are wearing aren't they?

Tammy: Oh yes. Friends are a great blessing in my life. I've been thinking about that a lot this week, as my friend Camara hosted a surprise party for my birthday. It wasn't a banquet but it was a lovely party.

Carol: What a nice treat for you! Happy Birthday!

Tammy: Thank you... It made me feel so special that people would want to celebrate with me. We had cups of tea and cakes. It was so much fun.

Carol: It *does* make you feel good when someone wants to do something special for you doesn't it? I imagine it feels like being a queen, when someone plans something special just for you! ...especially when it's a surprise!

Tammy: My lovely, surprise birthday party started me thinking about how important it is to be a *good* host. Camara, my friend, was the 'hostess' – the one who planned it and organised for people to come to her home. She made me feel so special and I thought maybe we could spend some time talking about that today.

Carol: What a good idea. I think we often don't realise how important the role of a hostess is. As women we often host meals or have people over to our homes but sometimes in the busyness of preparations we forget why we are doing this.

Tammy: We do, don't we?

Carol: I'm often so busy making sure that the table is set and the food is cooked, that I forget about making my guests feel welcome. I have learnt over the years that if I plan well then when the day comes I can relax, as I know everything will get done in good time.

Tammy: Planning is a great skill. I know I often have many thoughts racing around in my head when planning a meal. I'm always worried that I'll forget something.

Carol: I have learned to make lists for things like this. By planning out what needs to be done beforehand, I can work out what order to do things. It also helps me not to be too busy on the actual day. For example, I think about what foods I can cook the day before and what cleaning or shopping needs to be done.

Tammy: Lists are a good idea. You might make a list in your head, or you might make it on paper. There really is a lot more involved in being a hostess than you first think. What will we eat?

Carol: ...Where will we sit? What furniture do I need?

Tammy: ... Is anyone allergic to certain foods?

Carol: ... How can I decorate the room? Have I arranged a clean place for them to wash their hands?

Tammy: And yet a good hostess, makes all of this seem as though it has taken no effort at all. At my party, there were five of us for afternoon tea. Camara had made some sandwiches and some little cakes with pink icing, which are my favourite.

Carol: She knows you well...

Tammy: Yes... We sat around the table and drank tea, ate and talked all afternoon. But I know that it took time for her to make the sandwiches, to bake the cakes, to cut some flowers from her garden and to plan who to ask.

Carol: You're right. Something simple like some flowers in a vase or a tablecloth can make the room look much prettier. It also makes the guests feel extra special, particularly if the flowers or treats are favourites.

Tammy: Camara also knows that I love flowers, so to have some on the table was just another way of her showing me that I am special to her.

Carol: I often have a bowl of treats on the table to snack on, when people arrive. Like a bowl of chocolates! Most of my friends like chocolates.

Tammy: Me too! I was also thinking about how important it is to be flexible when you are a hostess. Even if we plan well, things will often turn out differently. If we're not flexible we might get upset that it didn't turn out just as we wanted.

Carol: That's for certain. Burnt food or spilt drinks. Unexpected things can happen.

Tammy: At my birthday party, one of the guests needed to bring her three year old daughter at the last minute. That was something Camara hadn't planned for, but she coped so well. She found some toys for her to play with. And it ended up being no problem.

Carol: I guess because she was so organised with the food and everything, she was able to solve the unexpected problems that arose.

Tammy: Camara was a good hostess because she made everyone feel comfortable and special.

Carol: Now, I'm sure Camara didn't treat people differently at Tammy's party - depending on what they looked like, or what they were wearing - like the man in our story. Tammy said that Camara made *her* feel special, but she made *everyone else* feel special too. What made you feel that way?

Tammy: Well, we already talked about the flowers and favourite foods. She made sure everyone had some food, and checked whether they were ready for another cup of tea. But Camara was also able to keep the conversation flowing during the afternoon. She would start a new topic to talk about which she knew everyone could talk about and enjoy.

Carol: What sorts of topics?

Tammy: Anything that we all had in common... our families, good recipes, funny stories we had heard.

Carol: That sounds like fun!

Tammy: Yes it was.

Carol: I've found that when I'm hosting a party with people who don't know each other, it often helps to introduce people and tell the other person something about them. For example, you can say something like, "This is Fiona, she has the best vegetable garden I've ever seen" when you are introducing her to someone else who loves gardening.

Tammy: That's a great idea. That way they have something to start talking about straight away...and there's no awkward silence.

Carol: I really like it because it means that my guests feel comfortable and then I can relax and enjoy myself too.

Tammy: That's important to remember. A party is supposed to be enjoyable for the hostess too. And by planning the party and making sure everyone is enjoying themselves – it helps the hostess enjoy herself too.

Thanks for joining us today for *Women of Hope* where we've been talking about hosting parties, and sharing some ideas about being a good hostess.

Carol: Tammy, talking about parties and guests reminds me of a story in God's word, The Bible. When Jesus, God's Son was on earth he spent a lot of meal times with people.

Tammy: He did! He often ate dinner in people's homes and went to parties. He enjoyed spending time with all sorts of different people. Some were rich and powerful. Others were poor and the outcasts of society...but he treated them all the same.

Carol: One day when Jesus was talking to a crowd of people he told them this story about the host of a party. Here's the story from the Bible. (Luke 14 : 16-24 NLT)

"A man once gave a great party and invited a lot of guests. When the party was ready, he sent a servant to tell the guests, "Everything is ready! Please come." One guest after another started making excuses. The first one said, "I bought some land, and I've got to look it over. Please excuse me." Another guest said, "I bought five teams of oxen, and I need to try them out. Please excuse me." Still another guest said, "I have just got married, and I can't be there."

Let's stop the story there for a moment. How would you feel if you were the host of this party?

Tammy: I think I would just sit down and cry. All that work to organise the party and then the guests give excuses not to come. That would be so upsetting.

Carol: And you know I think, I would be mad. None of their excuses were good ones! They could look at their land or their animals at any time. They didn't have to go then. Keep this in, I like the naturalness of this from Carol.

Tammy: And what about the person who said they had just got married? Shouldn't he have told the host that he would be busy when he first received the invitation? It's really not polite to refuse an invitation so close to the party...and especially when you don't really have a good excuse.

Carol: Would you like to know how the host in the story reacted to these excuses?

I'm sure you would...Well, the Bible says that, "the servant told his master what happened, and the master became angry then he said, "Go quickly to every street and alley in town! Bring in everyone who is poor or crippled or blind or lame." When the servant returned, he said, "Master, I've done what you told me, and there is still plenty of room for more people." His master then told him, "Go out along the back roads and behind the fences and make people come in, so that my house will be full. Not one of the guests I first invited will get even a bite of my food!"

Tammy: So, the host *did* get mad! I thought he would.

Carol: Yes, he did. But what did he do while he was angry? ...do you remember?

...Yes, he sent his servant out to find people to come to his party.

Tammy: I didn't expect him to do that. He was really determined to have people come wasn't he? He sent the servant out twice to gather people.

Carol: It was important to the host to have many people there. What did this Bible story tell us about the kinds of people the host invited to his party?

Tammy: Well...the first people he invited were important to him. They were people who had enough money to buy land and animals. Maybe they were his friends and business acquaintances. But after they gave their excuses, the host sent his servant to collect the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame. He invited *anyone* who would respond to his invitation. It didn't matter what they looked like, or how they were dressed.

Carol: It does appear that way. The host extended his invitation to his friends to anyone who wanted to join his party...not just his friends.

Tammy: The host seemed angry with the guests who said no to his invitation, but he enjoyed the party with those who finally came.

Carol: Yes he did. I'm sure he enjoyed their company and liked to see these people enjoying themselves.

Tammy: Just like you and I do.

Carol: This is where we can see the true meaning of this story. This story that Jesus told was a parable...a story with a message for the hearers to think about and learn from. When Jesus told this story he was teaching his friends about the character of God, his Father.

Tammy: So in this story, Jesus is saying that God is like the host of the party?

Carol: Yes. Jesus was trying to explain to his friends how much God wants to have a close relationship with us. Jesus often talked about heaven being like a great banquet, and everyone is invited to it. To get there we need to come back to God. We need to be forgiven for the wrong things we do, that keep us apart from him. God doesn't offer us an invitation to a party, he offers us forgiveness of our sins, the things we have done wrong. When our sins are forgiven, God's presence lives within us, both now and eternally. The most important message of this story is the fact that God makes this offer of forgiveness to all people.

Tammy: What an amazing God to offer people forgiveness so that he can be with us forever. And he does this just because he wants to. He loves us, he is our Creator and wants to spend time with us. Just like in the Bible story, when the host sends his servant out twice to bring in anyone who wanted to come. God will accept anyone who responds to his invitation of eternal life.

Carol: The Bible tells us that God showed himself to Abraham's descendants – the nation Jesus himself came from. He made them promises about protecting and saving them. But again and again the people chose not to live God's way.

Tammy: That's like the part of the story when the host's friends choose not to come to the party.

Carol: Exactly. But when Jesus came to earth, his teachings made it clear that God's offer of forgiveness was for *all* people. Not just the people of Jesus' country, who heard the message first. It's the same today: in some countries it is easy to hear about Jesus but many people don't want to accept his invitation. But the invitation is for *all the people of the world*. It's for YOU.

Tammy: Again, like the guests at the party. It means that the poor, the lonely, the outcasts are all valued by God.

Carol: God loves all people... men, women, children, the sick, the rich... Jesus spent time with all of those people and his actions showed how much God loves them.

Tammy: In the story, the guests at the party just needed to respond to the host's offer to be welcomed into the party.

Carol: Yes that's all they had to do... We need to respond to God's offer of forgiveness too. We can do that by praying to God and telling him that we accept his offer and would like to live our lives his way. Perhaps you could pray something like this:

Dear God, Thank you for loving us. Thank you for wanting us to be friends with you. I choose to say yes to your offer of forgiveness for my sins. Thank you for sending your son, Jesus, to earth to teach us what you are like...and to give his life for us. Please help me to live in a way that honours you,

In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

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