

## Hospitality

*“Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it”*

**Hebrews 13:2**

**Hospitality**—In Greek this is a compound word from *phileo* and *xenos*. We are familiar with *phileo* the word for brotherly love. We also know the word *xenos*, but in a different form, the Hollywood version, Xena. The word means “foreigner or stranger.” Xena is the foreign warrior princess. It means a stranger from another place. Today we usually associate hospitality with entertaining friends. But in the Bible, the culture was very different. Biblical culture is not Western. It is Eastern. Its customs come from Near Eastern tribal rituals. You see these customs displayed throughout the Old Testament, for example, when Abraham entertains the three strangers in **Genesis 17**. Showing hospitality to strangers was an essential part of a nomadic, desert existence. The host was responsible for protection as well as sustenance. In some cases, it could mean the difference between life and death.

This verse exposes a problem. Today we are suspicious of strangers. We teach our children to avoid strangers. We post our communities with signs that warn strangers not to enter. We have gated entrances, electronic security and guard dogs. We live in a world that fears the stranger. As a result, I’m afraid that angels pass us by.

Do you see that this verse presupposes an open attitude toward life based entirely on God’s ability to protect His children? If I am told to show hospitality to someone I do not know, I must act on the basis that my life will be protected by the one who tells me to be hospitable. To act this way is to make myself vulnerable. Of course, I could just make a donation. That is a nice, safe way to cooperate. But it is the issue of safety that stands behind this verse, not the requirement for providing entertainment.

This verse recalls the parable of the Good Samaritan. We often think that this parable is only about helping someone else, but it is more than that. It is about taking a risk on God’s behalf. Hospitality is the opposite to fear. The stranger is someone to fear until we see that God’s hand covers us. If you live afraid of life, many things will pass you by. But if your life is open to possibilities under the protection of God, you could entertain angels. You might be surprised to find out how often this really happens.