

Open Homes

What the Bible Teaches about Homes of Purpose

Before You Begin

If you have picked up this booklet, it is probably because the Lord has blessed you with a home: you have been given some personal space in His world, a space that may be your own or that you may share with a handful of family members. Your home is one of God's truly great graces in your life; it doesn't matter whether you own the space or are renting it, whether the space is large or small, whether you are married or single, whether you have children or not. He has given this gift to you freely and He is intensely interested in your choices about how you will value it and how you will use it.

As with any gift of great value, the Giver has not dictated terms regarding how His gift is to be used—there are no strings attached—but He has supplied you with enough information to get the most from it. The information and the examples of people who were successful in maximizing the gift of home are found in the Bible, and this booklet will be your guide to exploring both the instructions of Scripture and many real-life situations that were experienced by believers in Bible times.

The Bible word for the wise use of our homes is “hospitality”, the unique “feel” of a home that is open to the Lord for Him to share our space and for Him to invite others in. In order to experience this, you will need to have a partner to go through this study with you. Choose someone you like and someone who you would enjoy spending time with, your friendship is more important to growing in the grace of hospitality than their skills or even their level of spiritual maturity.

I recommend that you choose a study partner who has a similar household structure. If you are a single woman, find another single woman to partner with; if you are married, partner with another married family; if you are a single dad, find another single dad. As you study the Scripture together, you will be discipling one another in the best way to maximize God's gift of home. You need a partner whose home is somewhat like yours, so that you can grow together.

For married families, both spouses of both families need to be on board before you begin. All four of you will be partners in this process, so you should wait and pray until there is interest from all four. Each person should have a personal copy of the booklet and should do the study individually before you all get together to discuss it. You will also be practicing hospitality by opening your homes to one another while you seek the Lord for His guidance about the unique ministry opportunities He will bring home to you.

Finally, if you are a member of the Church of the Open Door community, I have included a special invitation to you to set apart your home as a “home of purpose.” After you have completed this study project, a few of your church leaders would like to come and dedicate your home to whatever purpose the Lord has placed on your heart.

If you invite us, we will come!

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Lesson One...

If you invite Him, He will Come

The Power of an Open Home

Next to the power of believing prayer and the power of obedient discipleship to Jesus through His Word, probably the most effective resource given to Christians is the key to their front door. When a believing family discovers how to unlock their home and invite others in, that family takes on new significance in the program of God on earth and becomes a base of operation for the Holy Spirit in their community.

What wouldn't you give to have had Jesus choose your guest room as a place to celebrate the Last Supper or as the place where He would pour out the Holy Spirit? What if you could have been the family that hosted a prayer vigil for Peter on the night of his execution—and then have Peter himself show up on your doorstep, miraculously released from prison? Or here is my fantasy: I have always wished I could trade places with the two guys who first met Jesus on His resurrection day and recognized Him when He broke bread at their table (Luke 24:30-31). After Jesus vanished right before their eyes, they ran all the way back to Jerusalem and got to inform the disciples that Jesus had risen from the dead—and while they were there, Jesus Himself came and those two men got to share in the reunion. That was a day I'm sure they never stopped talking about!

One thing all of these families had in common was that they welcomed people into their homes. The folks in Jerusalem with the upstairs guest room, were known to Jesus for their hospitality. He had such confidence in them that He could send Peter without an introduction to simply say (Luke 22:11), "The Teacher says to you, 'Where is the guest room where I may eat the Passover with My disciples?'" Jesus knew that their home was available for Him to use, because they had already committed it to be open for the Lord's purposes, and that was the home that He chose for His Last Supper. What an honor!

Put Yourself in the Picture

All of the Bible passages in this section are taken from Luke's historical account. In his gospel Luke recorded eleven homes where Jesus was invited, and Jesus accepted every invitation—three of the invitations He accepted were from His enemies who just wanted to trap Him! Look up the first three homes Jesus visited and try to put yourself in the place of Jesus' hosts.

	Jesus' hosts	How I would feel if it were my home:
1. Luke 1:39-45	<i>Elizabeth & Zacharias</i>	_____
2. Luke 4:38-41	<i>Simon Peter</i>	_____
Luke 5:17-26	<i>Simon Peter (probably)</i>	_____
3. Luke 5:27-32	<i>Matthew Levi</i>	_____

When Peter was miraculously released from prison by prayer, he knew where to go. "He came to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark, where many were gathered together praying" (Acts 12:12). This Mary had a reputation for opening her house up to praying people, and her home was where the church gathered to pray. Her son grew up around praying people and became an associate of apostles and the author of one of the gospels.

One of the two men who met Jesus on the road on His resurrection day was named Cleopas. He and his buddy talked with Jesus for two hours or more without recognizing who He was; they thought He was just a stranger from out of town. The only reason that these guys got in on all the action of Resurrection Day was that they invited a stranger into their home for a meal and to spend the night. "Stay with us," they said, "because it is getting toward evening and the day is spent" (Luke 24:29). It was Cleopas' hospitality to a stranger that opened the door for Jesus to reveal Himself, and Cleopas became the one to announce Christ's resurrection to the disciples and to be present when Jesus appeared. Don't you agree it would be great to trade places with him?

Everything we know about Jesus tells us that He loves to be invited. When you think about inviting Jesus into your home, do you have any doubts about whether He will accept your invitation?

❖ What are your personal reservations about inviting Jesus into your home? _____

Tell it to Jesus. Take a few minutes right now to talk with the Lord Jesus and tell Him about your concerns. If there are specific negative experiences from your past that make you wonder whether He would accept an invitation to your home, remind Him about those times. Ask Jesus to make you ready for a new era of openness.

What it Costs to Open Your Home

There are very good reasons why some people get to experience these powerful encounters with Jesus while others don't. With tens of thousands of homes available in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover, Jesus knew exactly whom He could trust to open their home for His Last Supper. Now that there was a warrant out for His arrest and a price on His head, probably the home Jesus chose was one of the very few where He would have been welcome.

Another person who opened her home to Jesus ended up with such a full house that "there was no longer room to receive them, not even near the door." Imagine this lady's surprise when people started taking her roof apart in order to bring a paralyzed friend in front of Jesus for healing! I am sure she was thrilled to be able to offer her home to Jesus for a meeting place, but somebody still had to put the roof back on.

One Pharisee of refined tastes invited Jesus for a meal only to find out that Jesus kept an open-door policy for prostitutes and other riff-raff. He discovered to his dismay that he couldn't have Jesus in and keep the other characters out. That's just one of the risks associated with opening your home for Jesus—He is a Friend of sinners.

While it was inconvenient for the people who hosted Jesus during His ministry, it was downright dangerous for those who welcomed the Apostle Paul. Everyone who housed Paul for more than a night or two ended up getting flak from the neighbors. At Thessalonica the Jews attacked the home of Jason where Paul was staying, "but when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city." Their accusation against Jason was that he harbored men who were breaking the de-

cree of Caesar, men who followed another king—Jesus (Acts 17:5-7). Jason did not serve jail time for this, but he did have to post bail...just because he opened his home to the servants of Jesus.

Let's go back and read between the lines to notice some of the costs associated with welcoming Jesus and His disciples.

Read **Mark 2:1-12** about the home where Jesus healed the paralyzed man. The repairs on the tiles would not have been expensive, but would certainly have been inconvenient.

❖ What other costs or hassles do you think the hostess encountered as a result of opening her home to Jesus on that day? _____

❖ Did Jesus' hostess receive any benefit? In your opinion was the benefit worth the inconvenience that came as a result of Jesus' visit? _____

Now let's read about the Pharisee's surprise in **Luke 7:36-50**. Did you notice that this was another situation where Jesus forgave a person her sins?

❖ How do you think this woman got into the Pharisee's house? _____

❖ How would you feel if this drama were played out in the middle of a meal you were hosting in your home? _____

Even today there are risks associated with inviting Jesus to your house, because He will send His people to you in His place. One family opens their home to a young couple that needs a place to stay between work assignments, and unforeseen circumstances keep the family and their camper in the driveway for weeks. Another couple agrees to host a small group one evening a week in their living room, but as their ministry to the group begins to deepen they find themselves regularly spending more and more time on the phone counseling and praying for the group members. What they

anticipated as a two-hour-a-week commitment is rapidly requiring the investment of their hearts and lives.

And then there is Jesus' attitude toward welcoming small children wherever He goes. When He decides to bring them into your home, you will find yourself dashing through your living room performing the five-minute drill we call "child-proofing." This drill is performed by drawing an imaginary line around the room at a height of 36 inches. Anything below the line and smaller than a golf ball you remove to protect the child; anything hard enough to break glass you remove to protect the coffee table. When you complete the drill to your satisfaction, any toddler worthy of the name will immediately locate a dozen items you overlooked!

When you consider the true cost of opening your home to be used by the Lord Jesus does it give you pause? Perhaps you are like me and would feel uncomfortable with twelve houseguests or a hole in your roof. But then on the other hand, it would sure be thrilling to be in the middle of what God is doing to expand His kingdom in our generation...

- ❖ What concerns do you have about the costs of opening your home to be used by Jesus? _____
-

The Surprising Events That Come to an Open Home

Hebrews 13:2 reminds us not to "forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels." The Bible records a time when this happened to Abraham's wife Sarah in Genesis 18.

Pause for a minute and read Genesis 18:1-16.

Abraham invited three visitors to spend the afternoon and eat dinner with him, but he neglected to mention to Sarah that the visitors were in fact angels, and one was the Lord Himself! The Lord had come on purpose to answer Sarah's prayer and to give her the desire of her heart, but she had no way of knowing. According to the custom of that time, Sarah did not eat with her male visitors but stayed inside the tent out of sight. If she had known whom she was cooking for she might have been more nervous about

it—and she certainly would have been careful not to make sarcastic comments under her breath! The Angel challenged her unbelief and promised that she would conceive in her old age and bear a son. “Don’t forget to entertain strangers;” you never know when the Lord may be looking for a home where He is welcome.

Simon Peter is eternally glad that he welcomed Jesus home for lunch after church one Sabbath day. It was at an early point in his relationship with Jesus and he was not yet one of the disciples, but his home was open for the Lord both to serve and to be served. As a direct result of Peter’s invitation to lunch, Jesus healed Peter’s mother-in-law; and after lunch Jesus spent the evening healing sick people from His new headquarters in Peter’s home.

A hint from Becca about how to invite Jesus and His disciples home after church:

Being prepared to serve lunch to another family after church on Sunday is easy, if you plan it out on Saturday. One of my favorite inexpensive meals is spaghetti. Browned ground beef with spaghetti sauce is warming in the crock pot while we are at church, and the spaghetti boils up in just a few minutes after we get home (and by that time we know how many will be eating it!), and a loaf of warmed French bread and a green salad round out the meal. I make sure I have pretty paper plates and cups in the house, in case we are many and cleanup seems like too big a project. I usually make a big pitcher of iced tea and check to see that I have sufficient ice in the freezer. If we are few, we sit around our table. If we are many, we sit around the living room (or send the kids out to the back porch!) and hold our plates in our laps. A piece of chocolate cake or a dish of ice cream is an easy dessert. This meal, filling and nourishing, is very much less expensive than taking guests out to lunch, even at a fast food restaurant. And the great thing is, even if no one comes home with us, the food does not go to waste. We can either eat the leftovers for dinner or save them till an-

Read the story in **Luke 4:38-5:11**.

After hosting Jesus’ medical clinic all evening Peter had been working all night and was trying to get his gear stowed so he could finally get some sleep, but he agreed to launch the boat one more time so Jesus could have a pulpit.

Beginning from the first minute Jesus stepped into his house (Luke 4:38) until the moment He stepped out of the boat (5:11), see if you can list five benefits that came to Peter as a result of welcoming Jesus:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Mary and Martha were two sisters who loved to have Jesus in their home. Even when He was considered a public enemy with a price on His head, they were unafraid to offer Him their home as His headquarters. During Easter week, Jesus never spent the night inside Jerusalem, but He and His men returned to Bethany every evening and received a welcome from the sisters. They were glad that they had made their home available to Jesus, because Jesus developed a deep love for their family over the months of their relationship and He risked His life to come to them during a crisis time when their brother Lazarus was deathly ill (John 11). Because their home was open to Jesus, it became the place where Jesus performed His greatest miracle when He raised Lazarus back to life after four days in the tomb.

Shortly after Jesus raised their brother from the dead, Mary and Martha were helping their neighbor Simon to welcome Jesus for a banquet in Simon's home. After dinner Mary brought out a very expensive ointment of spices that she poured out on Jesus, and He accepted the offering as the anointing of His burial (John 12:7). Think of it! Burial anointing is the service provided by the next-of-kin; it was what Jesus' mother was coming to do for Him on Easter Sunday, but she arrived too late—He had already risen from the dead! Jesus was accepting this Mary's service in place of His closest relative.

- ❖ Do you think they could ever have wondered whether opening their home was worth it? _____

Read the story of their first experience of hosting Jesus for a meal in **Luke 10:38-42**.

- ❖ What were Martha's expectations about having Jesus in her home? _____

- ❖ What was her big surprise? _____

- ❖ What is the most important lesson Jesus wants Martha (and us!) to know about what He likes to find in a home that is open to Him? _____

- ❖ What are some of the patterns of hospitality that you have seen or done that Jesus is probably going to want to change? _____

A Few Reasons that Keep our Homes from Fulfilling their Purpose

The lesson that Jesus taught Martha removed the greatest obstacle that she faced to having an open home. She already had the desire to welcome Jesus, but her hospitality was sidetracked by “worrying about many things.” She knew she was welcoming a VIP and she wanted her home and her meal to be fit for the occasion. As she became pre-occupied with getting the details right, she lost sight of the true reason for opening her home in the first place. If we are truly motivated to welcome Jesus and those He chooses to bring along with Him, we must realize that He is more interested in the loving and healing He will accomplish in our homes than whether our place-settings are all a perfect match.

This then is the key to our front door, and the first giant step toward having an open home. We begin by inviting Jesus. Then we invite Jesus to bring His disciples. Then we accept the fact that Jesus welcomes sinners and eats with them—we invite Jesus to bring His sinner friends. ***And whoever He brings to us we welcome in Jesus' name.***

Some of us have the temperament of Martha, and become self-conscious if people see our living area in less-than-perfect condition. It is hard to explain this to others, but we

detail-oriented people feel uncomfortable unless our personal space is organized and neat. Tidy Marthas need to hear the gentle reminder from our Lord Jesus who says, “You don’t need to worry about so many details.”

Another reason that many believers keep their doors shut is that they are afraid of wear and tear, and especially the incidental damage that just naturally follows children wherever they go.

For us introverts, probably the greatest fear keeping us from fulfilling our purpose is that we will lose our refuge. Men in particular feel a high need for privacy and quiet and tend to view their house as a castle to keep people away. We withdraw into our cave in order to refresh ourselves after a long day and we do not want to be disturbed. We resist opening our homes to the Lord Jesus, because we think, “Doesn’t He know that I need my privacy? If I let Him get started on ministry in my home, He won’t know when to quit, and I will never get any time alone.”

Another fear that I have heard some Christians express is that if they open the door to Jesus and His sinner friends, their own family will begin to become worldly and polluted. They feel the pressure of battle while they are out in the world earning a living or going to school, and they just want a quiet, spiritually nurturing atmosphere in their own living room.

One final and very difficult barrier for many believers is that their spouse does not share their desire to invite people in. Perhaps you find yourself in this situation, where you would like to open your home to Christ for ministry, but you are married to a shy or very private person who wants to keep the doors shut and locked.

- My greatest fear about opening my home to Christ Jesus is: _____

- The problem with our living arrangement that makes hospitality inconvenient is: _____

- The thing about our schedule that keeps us from ever having people over is: _____

- The person in our family who is most resistant to an open home is: _____

Though each of these barriers is real, Jesus knows how to overcome them all. The barrier that remains is our unwillingness to welcome Him. Jesus does respect our privacy and He almost never forces Himself upon those who close their doors to Him. He says to us, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he [will dine] with Me” (Rev. 3:20). He is offering intimate fellowship, but He will not overwhelm us or break down our doors.

Tell it to Jesus! Would you like to open your home to Jesus so that He would be free to bring people in? He never refused an invitation, so you can be sure that if you invite Him, He will come. Here is a sample prayer you could pray in your own words:

Lord Jesus, thank you for giving me a place to live. I want to dedicate my home to You, so that You can use it to bless others. I would especially like _____ (children, teenagers, Bible study groups, prayer groups, unbelievers) to feel comfortable and to receive healing in my home. Please bring them. Please bless them, and please give me the grace to welcome them in Your name. Amen.

Ask a friend! You will have a chance to review all you have learned from the Bible this week with your discipleship partner in their home. If you look around you will notice that not everything is perfect, and probably they have had to overcome some obstacles to be able to open up to you. This is the perfect time to mention the things that are troubling you and preventing you from opening your home. Your friend will pray with you and the two of you together will seek the Lord for His solution.

Lesson Two...

Making your home a place of ministry

Discerning your Target

Have you ever been asked to take pictures at a party or a reception? If you are not a professional photographer, the first time you photograph a reception is intimidating because there are so many pictures to shoot. In situations like that where there are so many targets, I become confused. There are so many good opportunities I don't know how to choose.

Put a professional photographer in the same situation and he will take far more pictures than an amateur like me, but even though he is taking a lot of frames he is being highly selective. Through years of experience he has learned what he is looking for and he concentrates on those opportunities.

When you begin to think about your home from the standpoint of ministry, the options seem truly limitless. So many people in your world are hurting and in need of a safe place, it's hard to know where to start! Often it is this confusion that keeps us from taking the first steps toward opening our homes. We need Jesus' help in choosing a target!

A couple of ideas to get you thinking...

- 1. Do you have a walking partner? Why not invite her over for a glass of iced tea after your walk? You might be able to share a book or DVD you've enjoyed. When she brings it back it will give you another chance to share your home.*
- 2. Do your kids play on a sports team? Why not invite their coach and family over for an appreciation meal?*

Tell it to Jesus: Before we go any further in this study, turn back to the last page of Lesson One. What target group did you write down in your prayer? Take a few

more minutes to ask the Lord to confirm whether this is the target group He wants you to concentrate on ministering to.

Even though God desires us to love and serve all of the people He brings into our lives, He also gives His servants specific target groups. When He sent His Son to earth it was for ministry to “the lost sheep of Israel.” He also gave His apostles specific people that were their responsibility; He sent His prophet Jonah to Nineveh; He sent Daniel to the court of King Nebuchadnezzar; He placed Esther in the palace of King Ahasuerus “for just such a time as this;” He sent Philip to explain the gospel to an Ethiopian official.

Peter and Paul were both very clear about their target groups: Peter’s group were Jewish believers and Paul’s group were the gentiles. Titus knew that the group God wanted him to serve were the people of Crete. The last paragraph of Acts 9 tells us about Dorcas who concentrated her energy on caring for the widows in her town and sewing pretty clothes for them to wear. One reason these New Testament believers were so successful in ministry is that the Lord gave them a group to concentrate on.

If you ask the Lord to reveal to you your special group that He wants you to serve, He will do it, though the specifics of His assignment will probably change over time. In this study, please notice the way He identified specific targets to His servants. He knows you can’t meet all the needs that are out there. Ask Him to give you a starting point with the people He has especially placed on your heart.

Turn in your Bible to **2 Kings 4** and read verses **8-10**, the most famous “open home” passage in the Old Testament. As we see so often in the Bible, it was the housewife who discerned a great opportunity for hospitality and mentioned it to her husband. The Bible calls this lady “a great lady” or “a notable woman.”

❖ Describe in your own words the way God guided her and the way she responded to His guidance. _____

This woman has such a great biography in the Bible, you just have to read the rest of the story, even though it’s not all about hospitality. Her whole story is contained in **2 Kings 4:8-37**.

- ❖ What blessings came to this woman as a direct result of her open home? _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

It just gets better...

Don't you love this lady's story! And the blessings she received for her hospitality just kept on producing results long after she and the prophet went their separate ways. I won't spoil the ending for you, but you can read it for yourself in 2 Kings 8:1-6.

Your Home as a Place of Healing

In the last portion of our study you read the biography of the “great lady from Shunem.” If you have ever heard someone refer to their guest room as “the prophet’s chamber,” they are making a reference to the famous guest room that was built and furnished by this remarkable woman. But I want you to notice something about the two great things she received from God in her biography. Go back and read **2 Kings 4:15-17** for her first request and then look at **4:21** as the background for her second request. Do you notice something about the two highlights of her life of faith? The touch of life in both cases came to her in the guest room that she and her husband built to serve Elisha!

Just as God used this family’s open home as an operating room for physical healing, He would love to use your home. God still works healing in His people and He still uses homes that have been dedicated to Him as safe places for healing.

Besides the physical healing that God works in people, He also loves to heal broken relationships and to restore the souls of the wounded and the hopeless. But usually people don’t reveal their wounds and broken places in public—it would be bad manners on their part and embarrassing for everyone else. Instead, when we are ill we go to a doctor we trust or to a friend that we know very well and we reveal the breakdown to that trusted person and we ask, “What is wrong with me?”

I have a doctor that I really trust, but I only go to see him when I feel like I have to, because I hate to take off my clothes and sit on a table so he can check me out. Do you

know that feeling? The whole process of finding out what is wrong with me is uncomfortable, but what I like about my doctor is that he doesn't chew me out for waiting so long to come and see him; he doesn't ever make me feel stupid; he doesn't make me sit there in my underwear any longer than necessary; he doesn't tell anyone else my secrets, and he almost always tells me what I need to hear rather than what I want to hear.

Could your home be a place where people come to find healing? Though the process is uncomfortable, will they leave your home encouraged? Will they feel that you treated them with dignity and respect and will they have no need to worry about whether you will be able to keep their secrets? Could it be that they will go home healed, not because you are so powerful or smart, but because they met Jesus in your home and experienced His power to heal?

Jesus performed many of his recorded healings in homes. In Capernaum He performed a great number of healings in the home of Peter's mother-in-law, but in His own hometown of Nazareth he had no place where He could heal.

Read **Mark 6:1-6** where Jesus returned to His own home and could only heal a very few people. Keep your bookmark there and then turn to **Luke 5:17-20** where Jesus was teaching in a home in Capernaum (probably Peter's) and "the power of the Lord was present to heal."

- ❖ What was the difference in these two homes that could explain why in one case "power was present to heal" and in the other "He could do no mighty work"? _____

The only difference I can see is that in Nazareth "He marveled because of their unbelief" (Mark 6:6) while in Capernaum "He saw their faith" (Luke 5:20).

Now go back and read the whole account of the amazing healing in Capernaum, **Luke 5:17-26**.

- ❖ What healing did Jesus accomplish first before He worked a complete physical healing? _____

In **Luke 8:49-56** Jesus was invited into the home of Jairus, a leader of the synagogue in Capernaum, because Jairus' daughter was deathly ill. Read the story carefully, noticing what Jesus told Jairus he needed to do.

- ❖ Why do you think Jesus locked everyone else outside except for the parents and His closest friends? _____

People tend to make two errors regarding healing. The first is the error of unbelief. If Jesus was unable to heal in His hometown because of the unbelief, then it is no wonder that in most Christian homes Jesus does not do "any mighty work." If there is one primary reason why more of our homes are not places of healing, it must be because of our unbelief, because we have no expectation that Jesus still heals.

But a second error is to feel that we can dictate the kind of healing Jesus performs, that it has to be spectacular. We see this sometimes on television when "evangelists" command people to be healed while they make them into a public spectacle. When we read the biographical accounts of Jesus and the apostles in the New Testament, we realize that Jesus does not treat people this way. There are dozens of healings and no two of them are exactly alike. Rather than producing a public sensation, most of the healings are fairly intimate and private. Some are inner healings of forgiveness and liberation from demon spirits; one man's eyes are opened by an application of saliva, another by an application of mud that has to be washed off in a particular pool; another man's eyesight is restored in a two-step process; for another guy something like scales falls off of his eyes after he first responds to the gospel. One lame man is healed after believing and being forgiven, and another lame man is healed in spite of his unbelief!

Read the account of how Saul's (aka Paul) eyes were opened in **Acts 9:1-19**.

- ❖ What part did Judas of Damascus play in this healing (v. 11)? _____

- ❖ What part did Saul play (v. 11)? _____

❖ What was Ananias' part? _____

❖ Whose part was the most difficult in your opinion? [The answer to this may depend on whether you think Judas of Damascus was a Christian or not. Take a bit of time to put yourself in each person's place and decide which would take the most faith and humility.] _____

Two healings occurred in Judas' home on Straight Street: one was an inner healing of spiritual vision and one was an outer healing of eyesight.

❖ Which healing came first and which was most crucial for Saul to experience? _____

❖ Why do you think Saul needed someone to host him and someone to touch him?

❖ Why didn't God heal him as soon as he repented and started praying? _____

Your Home as a Place of Refreshment

In the Bible there are many homes that God used as safe places for healing, but far more often He used homes as places to meet the everyday needs for food and sleep for His servants. God made us with these "everyday needs" on purpose so that He could show us how much He loves us by providing for these needs and so that we could love one another by providing refreshment for each other.

*Our idea about God making us with needs as a way to show and experience love came to us through our friends at Leadership Catalyst. We would be happy to tell you more about this or you can read their book called **True Faced** (Thrall, McNicol and Lynch, NavPress, 2004).*

Do you have a stereotype about hospitality, that it is a ministry that can only be performed by a full-time housewife in a perfect two-parent family home? This is the exception in real life and it is the exception in the Bible. Jesus invited Himself to lunch with the very imperfect Zaccheus (Luke 19:5) and accepted the invitation of Matthew Levi who gave a reception especially for his former partners in sin and drinking buddies (Luke 5:27-32). Levi was a brand-new believer and just wanted all of his friends to meet Jesus—that’s the kind of party the Lord Jesus loves!

Hardworking single women were also called to open their homes in the Bible. One of the most famous in the Old Testament was a widow who lived in Zaraphath. The Lord chose her for the ministry of hospitality, not because she was wealthy enough to afford it or because she had plenty of time on her hands, and especially not because she had a perfect home and family.

Read about this open home in **I Kings 17:8-16**.

This was probably not a home that Elijah would have chosen for himself if he were looking for accommodation.

- ❖ What were some of the drawbacks from Elijah’s perspective? _____

[Some problems I notice immediately are that she had no resources; Elijah would be a burden from the very first; she was a single mom and people might gossip about him, etc.]

Elijah asked her for her last tortilla.

- ❖ Do you think it took more faith for a man of God to ask for food from a poor widow or for the widow to fulfill his request? _____

❖ How did they both demonstrate faith? _____

Now read the rest of the story in **I Kings 17:15-24**.

❖ How did the ministry of hospitality bring both pain and blessing to the widow's home? _____

❖ Was it worth the pain and testing for this widow to open her home as a place of refreshment? _____

Homes of Purpose Trivia:

Did you know there are four books in the New Testament that have only one chapter?

Did you know that of these four books, three are written to give guidance about hospitality?

Check it out! Philemon is specific guidance about welcoming a repentant sinner and providing a place for a traveling apostle. Second John is instruction not to open your home as a platform and haven for false teachers. Third John is an encouragement to one believer who was getting "homes of purpose" just right.

Now turn to one of the books of the Bible that was written specifically to affirm the wisdom and value of using your home for ministry.

Read 3 John all the way through two times. The first time you read it, identify the three men who are mentioned by name (perhaps you will want to underline their names in your Bible). Two of the men are mentioned with approval and one meets with disapproval. Now read the letter again and notice what makes these men approved or disapproved.

Review 3 John 1-8.

❖ What was the main thing Gaius did that showed to John that his soul was “prospering”? _____

❖ What was especially good about Gaius’ refreshment of missionaries (see verses 6-8)? _____

In all of the New Testament the only direct prayer for prosperity that I know of is 3 John 2.

❖ Why was it important to John that Gaius was experiencing prosperity? _____

❖ How would it help the kingdom of God for Gaius to prosper and enjoy good health? _____

[If you want my answer, I think that John realized that whatever God gave Gaius he would give to others who were doing the work of ministry. Although Gaius was a common Roman name, I think this is the same guy mentioned by Paul in Romans 16:23. Look that verse up and see if you think that Paul and John might be talking about the same renowned believer.]

Now review 3 John 9-10. The word “receive” can also mean “welcome”.

❖ What was Diotrephes’ sick behavior that so disgusted John? _____

In verse 10 it seems that Diotrephes actually abused his position of authority in the church in order to prevent Christians from offering refreshment and hospitality to visiting missionaries and others who were passing through.

❖ What dirty political trick did he do to the Christians in his town who had open homes? _____

- ❖ What is John's conclusion in verse 11 about the two examples, the open home and the closed one? _____

- ❖ What are some things you feel God wants you to do in order to be an imitator of the good examples in 3 John? _____

Your Home as a House of Prayer

One of the purposes of our homes that is very highly valued in the Bible is as a place of prayer. That is how Jesus described the Temple when He chased the merchants out in Luke 19:46. Remember how Jesus said to them, "My house is a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of thieves!" Of all the things He loved about His Father's house, the best was that it was a house of prayer.

Would you like to imitate your Father in heaven and make your house a house of prayer? Remember that we are not to think of homes of purpose as having only one characteristic to the exclusion of all others. Prayer is just one of the purposes God has for your home, but it must be one that is very close to His heart, since it is the purpose He emphasizes for His own place.

Let's take some time in the Scripture looking at some of the examples of homes of purpose that were set aside especially for prayer. One that we have already mentioned in passing is the home of Mary the mother of John Mark. Mary's home was so well-known as a house of prayer, that when Peter was released from prison he went there immediately, knowing that he would find Christians praying.

Read the story in **Acts 12:1-19**, then go back and re-read verses 11 and 12 a couple more times.

- ❖ What was Peter's purpose in coming to Mary's house? _____

We can tell that Peter was not coming to Mary's house for a place to stay or a place to eat because he immediately left them to go to another place in verse 17. The only reason that Peter stopped at Mary's house was to show them God's answer to prayer and to allow praying Christians to be the ones to report the good news of God's answer to the rest of the church. This is one of the great blessings that comes to a house of prayer.

❖ What are some other blessings that you would expect to come to a house of prayer? _____

Acts 10 reports on the beginning of the gospel among the Gentiles. Try to read the whole chapter and notice that this is a story of two homes of purpose.

❖ What were the characteristics of Cornelius' home (v.2)? _____

❖ What do verses 5-6 tell you about Simon the tanner and his home? _____

❖ To what extent were these two houses "open homes"? Re-read verse 23 and verse 48 as you think about your answer. _____

❖ Would you characterize these two homes as "houses of prayer"? _____

Did you notice that in order to accomplish His purposes, God used two open homes and two men of prayer? It is no accident that Cornelius and his entire household received the Holy Spirit in verse 44. His home was well known as a house of prayer long before he met Peter. When he heard that Peter was coming, he was able to gather a large number of people, relatives and close friends. Cornelius was dedicated to knowing God through prayer, and that is why his home became a house of prayer and the place where the gospel first spread to the Gentiles. If we want our homes to become houses of prayer, we will first have to become people of prayer.

Here's a thought...

Often when missionaries are on furlough they are looking for new prayer partners. Something you could do to help a missionary friend on furlough is to prepare a "dessert night" at your home. Ask your missionary friend what would be a good evening for them and then invite others to come to your home for coffee and dessert and to meet a missionary. Make sure that before your guests leave, you pray together for the needs you have heard. Most missionaries have had plenty of experience recruiting prayer partners and your part will just be to provide an open home for believers to gather and connect.

- ❖ What do you think God would have you do to become a person of prayer? _____

- ❖ What habits will your family need to cultivate in order for your home to become a house of prayer? _____

- ❖ If God had an important message to proclaim in your neighborhood, do you think He would choose your home? Why or why not? _____

- ❖ What are some ways your home can be used to spread the blessing of prayer to others? _____

Your Home as a House of Prayer for all Nations

When Mark records Jesus' words about His Father's house he adds, "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations" (Mark 11:17). This is a quotation from Isaiah

56:7. Not only does God desire His house to be known as a house of prayer, but also as a house where all nations are welcome. That is why Jesus was so upset with the money-changers in the temple. They were specifically there to prey upon foreigners who were coming from other lands and did not have local money—they were cheating the people of other nations in the very place where God wanted them to come to know Him.

Human beings tend to view people of other tribes and nations with suspicion and prejudice, but this is not God's way. He delights to welcome people of all nations. Look up these references from the Old Testament and write in your own words the way God wanted the Israelites to treat the foreigners that came to them.

❖ Leviticus 19:33-34 _____

❖ Leviticus 23:22 _____

❖ Deuteronomy 10:18-19 _____

From the very beginning, even though God chose Israel to be His people, He always welcomed foreigners to come and worship Him. He even went so far as to say in Numbers 15:13-16 that foreigners could make the same offering as Israelites did and that the offering of both the native-born and the foreigner were “a sweet aroma to the Lord.”

❖ Have you ever been a stranger in a new place? What feelings did you experience?

❖ What do you like people to do to make you feel welcome when you come to a new place? _____

Here's a thought...

Do you know someone who is new to the area and has no family nearby? See if they would come to your home for a holiday that is traditionally a “family time.”

❖ Do you know any foreign nationals or international students in your area or in your workplace? Write down their names and nationalities here: _____

❖ What can you do to help these folks feel at home? _____

❖ How can your home become a house “for all nations”? _____

It isn't just at the beginning of the Bible where God welcomes people of all nations; also at the end we discover that He includes people of every nation around His throne. Look at this description of heavenly worship from Revelation 7:9-10:

After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”

❖ Would you like to join God's plan for including people of all nations? _____

❖ Do you notice any hesitation in your heart about welcoming foreigners? _____

❖ Write down any concerns you have about sharing your home with people of other nations. _____

Tell it to God. Take a few minutes to open your heart to God. Tell Him about any fears you have. You can also tell Him about any prejudices you feel toward people of other nations and races—it won't come as any surprise to Him! This would also be a good time to tell Him if you would like to get to know people from other nations who need His

love. You can be pretty sure that if you ask Him, He will make a point of introducing you to several strangers in need.

Tell a friend. Your next meeting with your discipleship partner is going to take place in your home. Does this make you nervous? Don't let it bother you. Your partner is not going to be grading you on the appearance of your home. Just like anyone else, they want to feel welcome and appreciated. Focus your energy and attention in letting them know you love them, and your hospitality will be successful by God's measure of success.

Take a moment and go back over your answers in Lesson Two and make a note of anything you especially want to discuss with them when they come over.

Notes:

For those who have children...

If God has blessed your home with children who are still living with you, I'm sure you have realized that an open home involves unique challenges for you. Before you begin your study of Lesson Three, just take a few moments to answer these questions.

- ❖ Do your children make you hesitate to open your home for ministry? _____
- ❖ Are you mostly concerned about your children (that perhaps they may feel their space is being invaded or that they may somehow be harmed by visitors) or are you mostly concerned about ways your children may get in the way of the ministry you dream of? Try to be as specific as possible about your concerns. _____

- ❖ As the Lord begins to lead you into a particular purpose, a ministry you would love to welcome into your home, what are some ways to involve your children in the ministry or (if they are old enough) in the decision-making process? _____

- ❖ Who would your children love to invite into your home? _____
- ❖ How have they reacted in the past when you have opened your home for ministry? _____

Your children are important members of your home, and unless they are very young, they will have definite opinions about any changes God is directing you to make! They should have the opportunity to learn Jesus' "Open Home" principles at the same time that you are discovering them, so that the Lord can move the hearts of your whole family. The Bible studies in Lesson One and Lesson Three are designed to be used not only for private study but are also for you to read during your family prayer time so that every member of your family can have a part in asking Jesus to bless people in your home.

Tell it to your Father. *God is a Father and He loves your children very much. You cannot "make" your children excited about hospitality as a family project, but He knows how to move them and to change their hearts. He will not call you into a ministry that is good for His kingdom and bad for your kids. Just take a few minutes to review these questions and concerns with Him, and watch to see how He works out the details.*

Tell a friend. When you and your partner get together next time, you might want to mark one or two of the questions on this page to discuss. Just be careful that you respect your children's privacy and don't share anything that would embarrass them.

Lesson Three...

Using your home to launch disciples

A Fortress or a Launching Pad?

There is a folk proverb that says “A man’s home is his castle.” I don’t know where this comes from in our cultural heritage, but I can sure see it in my neighborhood. Most of the houses on my street have central air conditioning, so all the windows and doors are kept closed up tight. The modern garage door is like the drawbridge of a fortress, allowing us to enter and isolate ourselves. In the twenty-first century, our homes are more and more like castles and fewer and fewer people are permitted to come inside.

Did you know that there is a psalm in the Bible that speaks to this condition? Psalm 127 was written by the wisest man who ever lived, a man named King Solomon. His home really was a castle! But Solomon realized that the truth about our homes has two sides. There is a defensive-protective side, and there is also a purpose for our homes that allows us to go on the offense. He came to understand that the homes of people who love God are both protected and powerful, they are both fortresses and launch pads.

Here is what he says about the defensive side of our homes:

*Unless the LORD builds the house,
They labor in vain who build it;
Unless the LORD guards the city,
The watchman stays awake in vain.
It is vain for you to rise up early,
To sit up late,
To eat the bread of sorrows;
For so He gives His beloved sleep.*

The first thing I notice about the defensive, fortress side of my home is that I am not the one who is ultimately responsible for keeping my family safe. Read over these verses again.

❖ Who is the architect and guardian of your home? _____

❖ What are some of the things that could cause you to lose your house? _____

❖ What are some of the things that could happen to destroy the peace of your home?

The fact is that we have no idea how many possible situations could arise to threaten us. If it were up to you and me to defend against every imaginable threat we would never get any sleep!

❖ But what is the good news that King Solomon realized about the defensive side of our homes? _____

In the first part of **Psalm 127** we learn that the Lord is the only one who can keep our homes safe. The defensive fortress side to our homes is His responsibility, not ours.

Now read the second half of the psalm:

*Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD,
The fruit of the womb is a reward.
Like arrows in the hand of a warrior,
So are the children of one's youth.
Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them;
They shall not be ashamed,
But shall speak with their enemies in the gate.*

Do you notice the difference? The first part of the psalm was all about defense, but the second half is all about offense. The fortress is defensive, but arrows are for attacking. The fortress stays in one place even when it is surrounded by enemies, but arrows are for going out to “have a little talk” with those enemies in the gate.

❖ In what ways are children like arrows? _____

Many Christians do not have children of their own, but they still have “arrows” in this sense.

❖ What other people in our life are like arrows ready for us to launch them? _____

Psalm 127 was written for people who love God, to give them confidence in spite of the hazards and dangers around them. Perhaps you have a particularly difficult time experiencing this confidence, because of things that happened to you in the home where you grew up or things you see happening in the culture around you.

❖ What experiences from your past keep you from being able to trust the Lord to protect you and your family? _____

❖ What hazards in your environment make you fearful about launching out the “arrows” (children, close friends, disciples) God has given you? _____

***Tell it to Jesus.** Take a few minutes right now to tell the Lord about your fears. Ask Him to give you confidence as you welcome others into your home and as you send out your disciples into the world.*

Ask a friend! Before your next meeting with your discipleship partner, you have an important assignment. Your partner will help you to think through how to invite someone into your home for hospitality. This may seem very natural to you, but it might also make you feel a bit anxious. Your partner will be very glad to lend an ear to listen to the anxieties you are dealing with. More importantly, they will pray with you for the Lord to give you confidence, and to make your home a blessing.

A Case History: The Greatest Missionary Family in the New Testament

If you were asked who was the greatest missionary in the New Testament, what would you answer? Many people would immediately think of Jesus, because He is the One who sends out the missionaries. Some would say Paul was the greatest missionary because most of the story of Acts is about his travels. But there is a family in the background of the missionary story who preceded Paul on every continent where he preached and who prepared the way for all of his most enduring missionary outreaches. If we are talking about the missionaries who covered the most ground and arrived there first, Priscilla (also called Prisca) and Aquila head the list as the greatest missionary family in the New Testament—even ahead of the apostles.

Does this answer surprise you? They didn't write any of the books of the Bible, and they did not preach any sermons that we know about; what they did do was to courageously use their home as a platform to make disciples for the Lord Jesus everywhere He sent them. Christ sent them first to Corinth when they were forced out of Rome, and their factory became the birthplace of the church in Greece. Then He sent them to Ephesus, and their home became the birthplace of the church in Asia. Then He let them go back home to Rome, so that they could plant the church in Italy at least three or four years before Paul arrived. In fact, all of Paul's long-term missionary projects (18 months in Corinth, 24 months in Ephesus, and two or more years in Rome) were made possible because Prisca and Aquila had moved into those cities ahead of time and developed a network of relationships. Here is what Paul had to say about this courageous couple (Romans 16:3-4): "*Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus. They risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.*"

Read Priscilla (Prisca) and Aquila's biography in these Bible passages and notice how in each case they prepared the way for the gospel.

- ❖ Read **Acts 18:1-5**. How did Prisca and Aquila help Paul plant the church in Corinth?

- ❖ Read **Acts 18:18-28**. In this passage the Aquila family moved from Corinth to Ephesus. How did they continue to promote the growth of the church at Achaia (Corinth) even after they had moved overseas to Ephesus?

Apollos was a legal scholar and a great public speaker, more gifted in preaching than even Paul was. He had a long and fruitful ministry as a preacher of the gospel in Corinth and in many of the other churches. Do you find it surprising that the Lord sent him to Prisca and Aquila's home for training instead of to the home of one of the apostles?

Time Out! *Let's just take a break from this story for a minute.*

Not all of us are called to be full time missionaries. Perhaps you know a few people you consider to be missionaries and perhaps you pray for them or at least have their picture on your fridge.

If you asked Priscilla and Aquila at this time in their lives whether they considered themselves missionaries, what do you think they would say? Were they doing anything that an ordinary Christian couldn't do?

Keep on reading the story from 19:1-10. More than a year had passed since Paul left the Aquila family in Ephesus. Do you think their lead-time in Ephesus had anything to do with the fact that Paul found disciples there already and that he was able to spend two more years just teaching the disciples that had already believed?

After Paul left Ephesus to continue his third missionary journey he was able to send back to Corinth a greeting from their friends Aquila & Priscilla.

- ❖ What strikes you when you read this special message in **I Corinthians 16:19**?

For years Paul had wanted to go to Rome and preach the gospel, but Jesus kept delaying him until the time was right for him to go. We know many things that the Lord did to prepare Paul for his ministry in Rome, and not much about how He prepared Rome for the ministry of Paul. But guess who He sent to Rome to start a church before Paul arrived? Turn in your Bible to Romans 16, to the list of the Christians in Rome that Paul was most attached to. Notice who is at the head of the list (**Romans 16:3-5**).

❖ What do these verses tell you about Prisca and Aquila's life and ministry? _____

❖ From the case study of the Aquila family, how would you describe their missionary strategy? _____

❖ What would you say their priorities were regarding their home? _____

their family business? _____

disciple-making? _____

and their willingness to move and start over? _____

❖ When you consider what it would mean for you to move your home and family business, would you welcome this as God's plan to extend your ministry or would you fight to keep what you've got? _____

❖ Would you say your home is currently more like a fortress or a launching pad? _____

The Heart is where Home is

You read that title correctly. The American proverb says, "Home is where the heart is," but in the teaching of Jesus the heart goes to wherever home is. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said: "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (Matthew 6:21). The treasure He is speaking of is whatever we most highly prize. If that treasure is stocks and bonds, then our heart will constantly return to check on how those treasures are doing. If what we prize is our career or our family business, then we will spend most of our waking hours thinking about advancing our career or business. If what we prize is our home here on earth, we will invest our energy in it and set our hearts upon the earth.

This truth brings me to a very difficult realization: your home and my home may be preventing us from following Jesus!

Read what Jesus said to one very zealous disciple in **Matthew 8:18-20**.

- ❖ Do you think the scribe got into the boat? _____
- ❖ What was it in the scribe's heart that was holding him back from being able to go with Jesus? _____

Put yourself in the scribe's place. If you had the chance to go everywhere with Jesus and walk with him, but if it meant you had to abandon your home, would you do it?

One of the most heartbreaking experiences I have is when the Lord sends me to share missionary opportunities in various churches and Bible schools. For every person who responds to the need and presents himself to Jesus for service there are at least four or five who tell me that they would love to serve Christ in foreign lands but they find it too hard to leave their homes and uproot their families. This makes me very sad. I am saddened not because they can't go overseas (very few Christians are called to do this!) but because they are missing the significance of the home and family Christ has given them. Their heart has somehow become anchored to an earthly home, when Jesus wants to draw them away from this toward the home He has prepared.

Take some time to read below these comforting words from Jesus' last conversation with His disciples (**John 14:1-3**):

Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many [homes]; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.

In this passage I supplied the word “homes” where Jesus literally said “dwellings.” Jesus used this word to distinguish between a house and a home. A house is just a place, but a home has the emotional attachment of belonging. Jesus made us a promise that He will keep: you and I have a home; and you and I have a place where we belong. Let me say it again, “You have a home prepared especially for you by Jesus and it will never be taken away.”

You and I have a longing in our heart for a home that we will never have to abandon, and God put that desire deep within us. No house or home on this earth will ever be able to satisfy that longing. If your house lasts long enough for you to finish paying the mortgage, you may consider yourself fortunate! But Jesus whispers His promise, “I have prepared a dwelling place for you that is far better. I am custom building it with you in mind. It won't wear out, and you won't have to move.” When you are looking at houses, location is the most important consideration. Look back at Jesus' promise to you.

❖ What are two things you notice about the location of your custom home (notice especially verse 3)? _____

Although location is the most important thing about housing, in Los Angeles County where I live, another important consideration is durability. Can the house and the neighborhood survive an earthquake? Look up **Hebrews 12:25-28** and notice the difference between the Israelite kingdom on earth and the kingdom of God in heaven.

❖ What does verse 28 tell us about the heavenly kingdom's durability? _____

The Main Thing Not to Do

As you think through the attitude God wants you to have toward your home and how you can open it for Him to use, it is important to keep a couple of definitions in mind. “Hospitality” is the attitude of openness and generosity that welcomes needy people. “Entertaining” is the attitude of display that makes a favorable impression on people who are important to you. My partner Ed Underwood’s proverb is that entertaining says, “Look at me!” while hospitality says, “Look at you!”

Jesus had many important things to say regarding hospitality and we will look at them in just a moment. But first let’s look at what He did. He was happy to accept any invitation, but He also received and welcomed guests. The first thing He did after He was baptized was to welcome Andrew and Andrew’s friend to spend the night with Him. Then Andrew went and found his brother Peter, and apparently Jesus fed and housed Peter as well (John 1:37-42). And do you remember Jesus’ first miracle? It happened at a wedding feast in Cana. Jesus was invited along with His disciples, and His mother was somehow involved in organizing the reception (John 2:1-11).

Take time to read **John 6:1-15** and then read **John 21:1-13**. These passages describe the times when Jesus modeled hospitality. Try answering the following questions keeping in mind Jesus’ attitude toward needy people in the four passages above (housing for Andrew; water into wine; food for 5000; breakfast for the team).

❖ What motivated Jesus to turn water into wine or to feed the crowds? _____

❖ What actions did He take to keep people from being impressed with His (pretty spectacular!) hospitality? _____

When Jesus Himself was hungry and thirsty He did not do miracles to provide for His own needs (for example after His long and tiring trip in **John 4:6-7**).

❖ Why do you think He created food and drink for others and not for Himself? _____

Many times Jesus accepted invitations to visit in other people's homes, and we already noticed that He never turned down an invitation. Once when He was invited to the home of one of the important Pharisees He gave specific instructions on how to give and receive hospitality. He noticed that the big shots in Jerusalem used their homes as platforms for entertaining important contacts rather than as places to care for needy and hurting people. Jesus decided to concentrate His attention on the one man in the crowd who was not trying to impress anyone.

Read the account of Jesus' actions and His instructions in **Luke 14:1-14**.

❖ What is the most important thing not to do if you are a guest? (Put this in the context of your world and the invitations you typically receive.) _____

❖ What is the most important thing not to do if you are a host? _____

❖ When you think about people you would like to invite to your home, which of these people would Jesus advise you to invite? _____

A good question to ask yourself before you invite someone over to your home is, "Am I doing this because of social obligation or because I feel this person has needs that Jesus wants to meet in my home?" If you are convinced that Jesus wants to meet someone's need or heal someone's hurt in your home, then you can pray in confidence that the Lord will bless your time together. You will be asking the Lord to give a gift to your guest, and you won't be taking the credit for it.

Your assignment!

Before you meet with your discipleship partner to discuss this final lesson, you need to complete one extremely important assignment. This discipleship course will miss its main purpose unless you accept and follow through on this crucial task.

Spend some time asking the Lord Jesus about people in your life who need His touch of healing and encouragement. Ask Him to help you choose a guest or two to invite over to your home for a couple of hours of refreshment. Ask Him to search your heart so that you can be sure your motive is to bless them and not to entertain them. Then take at least a couple of days to pray that He will use their time in your home to encourage and build them up.

Then invite them over and see what Jesus does in your home! If Jesus is doing it, you can be sure it won't all go according to your plan. When you get together with your partner to discuss this lesson, tell them your perception about how your assignment went. Write down a few notes so you'll remember what you want to discuss:

Home-Team: The Next Step in Increasing Your Reach.

Have you ever noticed how some of the best apparent opportunities come up empty while some opportunities with very small potential produce big results? Whether it is the NFL draft or a movie premiere or the release of a new software product, often success is wrapped in the most inconspicuous package.

It was like that when Paul first brought the gospel to Greece. The city with the greatest obvious potential was Athens. In Athens there was no persecution from the Jewish authorities, and Paul was invited to speak at Mars Hill, the prime venue for religious discussion in the whole world. Acts 17:17 also reports that "he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with the Gentile worshipers, and in the marketplace daily with those who happened to be there." These were great opportunities with every expectation of success, but Paul was not able to establish a church of any kind in Athens.

Instead of impressive Athens, it was corrupt Corinth where the church really took root. The impressive opportunity with the big names on Mars Hill resulted in only a handful of conversions, but the church in Greece was planted in a small factory in the Jewish quarter of Corinth, and the real growth occurred in an obscure home near the synagogue. Why did the church plant succeed in Corinth rather than Athens? The venues were less impressive, the hearers were few, the persecution was greater, but in Corinth Paul was able to “continue a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them” (Acts 18:11).

When we read the account of Paul’s preaching in Athens and Corinth side by side, the main difference we notice is that in Corinth Paul found two open homes from which to minister and in Corinth his team was back together. Back at Athens there were great opportunities, but in Athens he was alone. In Corinth the team was back and unified; and “when Silas and Timothy had come from Macedonia, Paul was compelled by the Spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ” (Acts 18:5).

Would you like to see long-lasting results from the gospel in your city? During this discipleship study we have noticed over and over again how important an open home is to the progress of the gospel. You have been growing in your willingness and confidence that God will use your home to bring glory to Himself. But more importantly, I hope you have been growing to know and love the family that is partnering with you in this process. It isn’t just about the place where you meet, it’s about the people who are in this ministry together with you.

Read Acts 18:1-6.

- ❖ Why do you think Paul held off on preaching the controversial parts of his message until his partners arrived? _____

Up until the Jewish leaders rejected Paul, he had been teaching in the synagogue. But then he began to teach next door (Acts 18:7-8). Describe the home of Titius Justus where Paul taught next after being thrown out of the synagogue.

- ❖ What made the new location so good for ministry? _____

Remember these principles that are at the heart of a successful home ministry:

- Hospitality is about opening my home first to Jesus, and then to people who need His healing touch.
- If you invite Jesus, He will come.

To these we can add the principle of team, that home ministry is most effective when Christians work together. Read the account of Jesus sending out His twelve disciples in **Mark 6:7-13** (this sending is also reported in Luke 10:1-16 or Matthew 10:1-15). Notice that “He sent them out two by two” and that He told them they should stay in whatever home would receive them.

❖ If there was no open home in a place, what should the disciples do? _____

Jesus sent his men out in teams; there were no lone rangers. Two-by-two is an important ministry principle that Jesus insisted upon. The other principle He insisted on is to look for an open home and use it as a platform for ministry. If there is no open home, then go somewhere else.

At Church of the Open Door we practice these principles in our small group ministry. We insist that there should be two families in partnership to care for the group and there has to be an open home where the small group can regularly meet. Sometimes we have to wait and pray for many months before the right team comes together and the right home opens up, but we find it is worth the wait.

❖ What are some other areas of ministry you can think of where Jesus’ twin “HOMETEAM” principles apply? _____

Tell it to Jesus! You have had several opportunities to get to know your discipleship partners during this project. Take a few minutes to write down several things you have learned to appreciate about them, and then go over this list with the Lord Jesus to thank Him for giving you such a good partner.

Tell a friend! If it seems appropriate (and it's almost always appropriate) encourage your discipleship partner with some of the things you have noticed and appreciated about them.

Notes:

A Day of Dedication

Whenever an important building opens its doors for the first time, people like to participate in a celebration. Often the process of preparing the building has been lengthy and difficult, and it just seems appropriate to get the main participants together to celebrate the occasion.

Have you come to a decision to open your home to the Lord Jesus and to those He chooses to bring? Perhaps you have made hospitality a practice in your home for a long time but now you are asking Him for opportunities in a more purposeful way. As your pastors and church leaders we would love to come to pray with you to dedicate your home and to hear some of the ways the Lord is directing you. We won't all be able to come, but this is something we want to participate in. Your discipleship partner or your partner family would also love to be invited to join you in this prayer of dedication.

If you invite us, we will come!

Lord, thank you for giving me a place to live. I dedicate it to You, so that You can use it to bless others. It is my dream that You will use my home to meet the needs of _____. Please bring them in. Please bless them here, and please give me the grace to welcome them in Your name. Amen.

On _____ we/I dedicated our/my home to the Lord to be an "Open Home". The leaders from Church of the Open Door who joined in this dedication and prayed for us/me were:

Discipleship Partners: _____
