



The blessing of hospitality

How do you feel when someone pops in unannounced? It's not always easy to welcome 'strangers'. You may worry how you will get on with them. Will they like the food or put extra pressure on the family in an already busy schedule? But the Bible commands us to be hospitable, to be kind and rich in good works.

The great example in the Bible of hospitality is Abraham and he is surely the one the writer had in mind in Hebrews 13 verse 2. "Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels." When he saw the three men coming towards him, little did he realise they were angels, bearing the incredible news that Sarah his aged wife would have a child by the same time next year. Of course Abraham didn't know this when he welcomed them; he was just doing what we as Christians should do – being friendly and kind. It involved sacrifice – he had to put aside his own plans for the day, bear the pressure of the moment and make time to listen to their news. The biblical narrative emphasises his genuine welcome, kindness, warmth and generosity. But just imagine if he had instead grumbled under his breath at this unexpected intrusion of his normal routine and acted meanly; the good news may never have been given and he would have missed out on a great blessing.

Having a summer team means laying aside normal ministry, welcoming "strangers", cooking meals and making sacrifices as a family. There are extra apprehensions in being overseas too – the what if's – what if they can't cope with the heat, the insects, get homesick, don't get on between themselves, or with us, or fall ill a long way from home?

But what an incredible blessing we had! We have just waved off Valerie, Karen, Kathleen, Lindsay, Louise, Rebecca and Pastor Peter Cresswell from Yatton, this year's summer team to Brazil. They are no longer strangers to us! The team came from different countries and backgrounds but there was no sense of conflict – they were united.

Unlike Abraham and Sarah, we knew in advance they were arriving so we could prepare. Some things didn't go as planned, but God knew better. Some of the team arrived but others had been delayed in their flight from Heathrow. It was frustrating for them, but made things less daunting at our end as we got to know the members of the team in stages.

What a blessing it proved to be. For this one week we suddenly had seven keen, extra workers from 'back home' who willingly and joyfully got stuck in. Peter preached for Andrew both morning and evening and taught in Hebron seminary. The team painted-up two humble homes for Dona Irene and Dona Emelinda (two elderly ladies) who were really thrilled by their "good works".

They went into a public school and saw the shocking conditions of education for ordinary children. The team were all able to use their gifts and left a really good impression on the kids, teenagers and staff. The headmistress opened up in a way she had never done before about the difficulties she faces for funding the school, and our bond with the school was strengthened. It was a really profitable time.



Even the family's small 'sacrifice' was transformed into blessing. We never out-give God!



Our own Brazilian young people (especially the single lads!) were keen to meet the nearly all-girl team. There was time for beach volleyball one night and a social evening another. But most of all the team really helped at São Pedro, coming alongside the children for three days in a way which just isn't possible for Francisca and ourselves every week. They gave one-to-one attention and showed the love of Christ in action, bringing God's word in a gentle way each day to over fifty needy children, as well as having fun and games with them. Our next Sunday evening saw a good number of parents and children come along to the church in São Pedro. Clovis who leads up the work was so encouraged.

Just imagine if we'd said 'no' to having a team. There were all sorts of valid reasons to do so: it's the girls' holidays, we need family time or we're just too busy with ministry. Yet we would have missed out on so many blessings. How encouraging to see God raising-up the next generation as his witnesses. How healthy to meet Christians from different backgrounds and to see how God equips and uses each for his work. How good for our girls to have older girls visiting from the UK who could play with Amy, cook popcorn for Sarah, and share with Hannah and Maria about their career choices. Even the family's small 'sacrifice' was transformed into blessing. We never out-give God!

So next time you're asked to receive strangers, think about Abraham and Sarah. Be challenged by God's command to be hospitable. We didn't receive angels, but we had the joy and privilege of welcoming an experienced pastor and six godly young girls open to God's call to serve him as future missionaries – perhaps even here in Brazil. What a wise investment of time and energy. We wouldn't have missed it for the world!

Andrew & Jenny Love