

From Intimidation to Inspiration
By Judi Reid

“Mother, may Nancy spend the night with me this weekend?” I asked as a young girl.

“If she *has* to!” Mother moaned. “Make sure the monogrammed, scalloped sheets and matching pillowcases are clean. Get out the good guest towels. Pick up everything around the house. And talk to Janie (our housekeeper) to make sure we have enough food for her to eat! You’ll have to be quiet so you don’t disturb your father!”

It makes me exhausted just remembering what an ordeal it was to invite someone into my own home as I was growing up. As you can imagine, offering hospitality was rare.

When I became a mother, my desire was to have our house be a real *home*, unencumbered by perfectionist showcasing. I had not learned to cook or do housework. When we bought our first microwave, I even wrote a recipe card with directions on *How to Boil Water in a Cup for Coffee*. Decorating was a disaster. Clutter was constant. But the love I have for my children gave me the determination to break the cycle of erecting barriers to having their friends drop in-whenver they wanted.

This open-door attitude did not, however, apply to *my* friends! I was fearful of criticism about my weaknesses as a housekeeper and hostess. Yet, I was so honored when I was invited to someone else’s home. The less elaborate the event, the more relaxed and connected I became. Something in my spirit yearned to be able to replicate those special times within the four walls of my own home.

Then came my breakthrough. Twelve years ago I was invited to dinner at Chuck and Kathie Crismiers' with my husband and several other couples. Even from the outside I noticed they had a huge, beautiful house. As we walked through their interior, I could feel myself cringing with inferiority.

When Kathie announced dinner, we proceeded into her well-appointed kitchen. Right away I relaxed. She had everything laid out on the countertops so beautifully, but simply. This was going to be fun! We each picked up a dinner plate and progressively heaped food from various bowls to create our individual culinary masterpieces. Somehow Kathie had preplanned the timing so the elements of the meal would look delectable, stay hot and be easy for us to serve ourselves—and with not a trace of a used pot or pan.

She made it look so easy. The atmosphere was immediately jovial and without the *hostess tension* that I was prone to experience. When we all sat around her dining room table, although everything was elegant, we were able to be casual. The focus was on the fellowship.

To this day, I am moved almost to tears by the lessons I earned that night.

- Keep it simple.
- Focus on showing Christ's love from your heart to your guests.
- Hospitality is about connecting with the people who accept your invitation.
- The visibility of the hostess' gifts and talents for elegant decorating and entertaining are to be valued.
- A lack of similar skills does not negate the heart of the hostess.

Kathie's God-given gifts are extremely creative, enhanced by the genuine warmth of who she is. Once I moved away from my personally-inflicted intimidation to appreciation, I was able to receive, from a softened heart, God's blessings of the evening.

My God-given gift is encouragement. Before I left that evening, I urged Kathie to write a book—for people like me—who dread even the thought of entertaining in their own home—who feel so inadequate and inferior—so overwhelmed with anxiety that the whole family is *victimized* by the preparations—who need tools to create a connection of Christ's love through food in a relaxed home atmosphere.

She did.

Don't Forget

Give yourself to hospitality. Remember, it may well be the closest you will ever get on earth to the face of God. You may even entertain angels unawares. Most certainly you will be blessed and you will be a blessing. Think hospitality! Plan. Get started. And don't forget that God's grace is sufficient for you, for His strength is made perfect in your weakness.

*As you now open your heart, hand and home in hospitality, write to let us know how God is working in and through your life in reaching to others. Let your life and testimony open the door of hope for yet another to experience *The Power of Hospitality*.*

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