

# Attending to the Visitor

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We've all been the visitor before. We've felt the awkwardness or even fear of walking into a new place for the first time. We know the difference between a friendly church and those assemblies where we didn't feel very welcome.

The importance placed on the visitor is seen in many places we frequent. They may have a Visitor Center or offer Visitor Parking. Hospitals have Visiting Hours. Shouldn't the visitor be taken care of when they come to the house of the Lord?

We have a riptural responsibility that extends beyond the borders of our brethren. In both passages that list the qualifications of elders, these men must be "hospitable" (1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:8). But this is not just the duty of the elders; it is for all the saints. In Romans 12:13, Paul says that the individual should be "contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality." The Greek word "hospitality" literally means "love of or to strangers." Why would God want His people to love strangers, sojourners, or aliens? "For you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Ex. 22:21).

In Genesis 18, Abraham attended to the three visitors who came him way. We should imitate the father of the faithful in this regard.

**He looked.** Abraham was "sitting at the tent door in the heat of the day" (Gen. 18:1). This was apparently a custom of the day, to watch for travelers who might need food or drink or a place to stay. And he "lifted up his eyes and looked" and saw the three men (18:2). Nowadays, we're just the opposite. We get home and close the garage door. We put solar screens on the windows so nobody can see in. We do everything we can to make it look like we're not home when somebody rings the doorbell. We prefer to be isolated!

Why don't we look? We are too busy thinking about what else we have to do that week. We are focused on the "important" things we need to get to once worship is over. When we do that, visitors can walk right past us without us even noticing that they are there. Look! We are all too often involved only with the people around us. After services, we talk just to those who sit around us. What kind of impression does that make on a visitor? Is it an environment that makes them want to come back and be a part? Or cause them to say, "I'll never fit in there?"

**He ran.** Abraham was excited about this opportunity to serve. He "ran" to meet them (Gen. 18:2). He "hurried" into the tent (18:6). He told Sarah to "quickly" prepare the bread cakes (18:6). He "ran" to the herd to select the calf (18:7). His servant "hurried" to prepare the meal (18:7). These are indications of how important this was to

Abraham, more so than any other item on his agenda that day.

We must show our visitors that same urgency. In the sports world, it's called "hustle." It shows a willingness to go above and beyond, giving your all, not just doing things out of duty. Let's run to attend to our visitors. Can you greet someone when they come into the building? Can you help someone find the Bible classes for their children? Can you ask them to sit with you? Can you invite them to eat lunch with you and your family? These are our best prospects. They have already demonstrated an interest in the things of God. They have come through our door. Hasten to attend to their needs.

**He gave.** This ended up being an expensive visit to Abraham's tent. Not only did he supply them with water, bread cakes, curds, and milk, he prepared a "tender and choice calf" (Gen. 18:7). This would have most likely been one reserved for a special occasion. Abraham could think of none better. He gave his best.

For us, the worship service happens several times a week. For some of our visitors, it is their very first one. We must give our very best every time we assemble, not only because God is worthy of such but because of the effect it has on the "unbeliever" (1 Cor. 14:22-25). "He will fall on his face and worship God, declaring that God is certainly among you." What a gift!

"Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it" (Heb. 13:2). By being a blessing to his visitors, Abraham became a blessing to all nations of the earth. Let us be so attentive for the Lord's sake. Especially when visitors come into His house.