

If You Feed Them They Will Come

By Sharon Jaynes

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When my son was in junior high school, I learned a valuable way to keep his friends coming to our house to congregate. If you feed them, they will come. In the Bible, Paul encourages us to practice hospitality, and I know of no better group to show that hospitality to than my sons friends. Think of the benefits of having your house as a congregating place. First, you'll get to know who your kids are hanging out with. Second, you'll get to make an impact on who your kids are hanging out with. Oh, sure, you may have to clean up drink spills, vacuum the carpet more often, and make frequent trips to the grocery store, but all this is a small price to pay for having an impact on the next generation.

In my own life, I wasn't raised in a Christian home. But a family in my neighborhood, particularly a mother of a friend of mine, took me under her wing and treated me like I was her own daughter. I spent many hours at the Henderson's home, sleeping in their guest bedroom and yes, eating their food. I got to observe a family who loved Jesus and loved each other. This was very new to me – on both accounts. Mr. And Mrs. Henderson would hug and kiss around us and even had pet names for each other. I didn't know why that family was so different from mine, but I knew that difference had something to do with Jesus Christ. Why Mrs. Henderson talked about Jesus all the time and acted like she knew Him personally! That was strange to me!

Eventually, this family invited me to go to church with them and when I was fourteen, Mrs. Henderson asked me if I was ready to accept Christ as my personal Lord and Savior. With tears in my eyes and a heart bursting with love for my newfound Lord, I said, "Yes!" From that time on, my life was never the same. Oh, friends, the story is very long and has many twists and turns that only our Heavenly Father could orchestrate. But over the next six years, my mother and father both came to know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

Because of the impact that one family had on my life, I was committed to do the same when I became a parent. We always welcomed our son's friends into our home. It is never unusual for us to set an extra plate at dinner or find a few stratty-headed teenage boys asleep on our rec room floor on Saturday morning.

Steven's friends know that we have certain rules in our house about movies and language. They know that Steven's dad or I might walk into the room at any time. That know that we love Jesus with all our hearts – and some think that's a bit strange. But you know what else? They know that we love them.

While we are very open about our faith, we also want Steven's friends to see that Christians can have fun! For example, on Steven's eighteenth birthday, I hosted a formal dinner party for several of his friends. Both the girls and the guys dressed up in their best attire and enjoyed a candle light six-course meal – served by their humble host and hostess.

Before the dinner began, I went around and prayed a blessing over each young man and woman. I thanked the Lord for something special I had observed over the years in each one and asked God to bless each one in a unique way, depending on where the friend was in their relationship to Christ. Some were Christians and some were not. Some were incredibly moved by the blessing and some thought it a bit strange. Again, I had earned the right to do this because I had been loving them for many years. After the dinner and the blessing, we took the kids in the den and taught them how to swing dance. Then we all piled into a few cars and took them to hear a live swing band and practiced our steps.

Now what was their response? They saw that we loved Jesus, we loved them, and we could still have good clean fun. (I want to add here that I told Steven what I wanted to do – in giving a blessing to each person at the dinner party. We discussed it together and Steven gave me permission to do it. I would never have done this if it had been an embarrassment to him in any way. I feel this is very important and would not have been showing love to my own child had I proceeded without his blessing.)

That is just one example of how we have shown hospitality laced with the love of Christ to our son's friends through the years. Most of the time it is simply having food available. Slice and bake cookies, microwave popcorn, salsa and dip, and soft drinks are small investments that yield great returns!

As a mom, if you grow weary of kids traipsing in and out of your house, think of Paul's words in I Peter 4:9. "Above all, love each other deeply....Offer hospitality without grumbling."

The word hospitality looks a lot like the word hospital. Your home may very well become, not only the gathering place for kids, but also a "hospital for wounded hearts." And remember these two pieces of advice from someone who has nursed many a wounded child...If you feed them, they will come. If you love them, they will come again