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Loving Our Neighbors: A Review of "The Gospel Comes with a House Key"

Abstract

"Have we authentically shared the gospel in ways that people can hear, see, touch, and taste? Has 'loving our neighbors' been genuinely, substantially, and sacrificially practiced?"

Posting about the book *The Gospel Comes with a House Key: Practicing Radically Ordinary Hospitality in Our Post-Christian World* from *In All Things* - an online journal for critical reflection on faith, culture, art, and every ordinary-yet-graced square inch of God's creation.

<https://inallthings.org/loving-our-neighbors-a-review-of-the-gospel-comes-with-a-house-key/>

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Comments

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in things

June 8, 2018

Loving Our Neighbors: A Review of “The Gospel Comes with a House Key”

Emily Rowe

Title: [The Gospel Comes with a House Key: Practicing Radically Ordinary Hospitality in Our Post-Christian World](#)

Author: Rosaria Butterfield

Publisher: Crossway

Publish Date: March 30, 2018

Pages: 240 pages (Hardback)

ISBN: 978-1433557866

The statistics are hard to ignore: America is on its way to becoming a [post-Christian nation](#), and our younger generations (Millennials and Gen Z) are gravitating toward atheism.¹ What are the reasons for this cultural trend? Are we as Christians, as some claim “under attack,” or is it possible that we bear some responsibility for our declining influence in America? Perhaps it is time to start asking ourselves hard, uncomfortable questions: Have we authentically shared the gospel in ways that people can hear, see, touch, and taste? Has “loving our neighbors” been genuinely, substantially, and sacrificially practiced?

Rosaria Butterfield’s book, *The Gospel Comes with a House Key*, asks these questions, and the answers she gives cut through the hardened idols of comfort and security that I’m guessing we all struggle with in twenty-first century America. Through narrative, Butterfield expertly shares her own experiences with ordinary hospitality and portrays how it can be a profoundly tangible means of grace to our neighbors.

Beginning the book with a snippet of her own conversion story, Butterfield shares how a local pastor and his wife opened their home to her on a regular basis, even though she was a self-described “radical, committed unbeliever.”² Her unique testimony – previously identifying as a lesbian (actively lobbying for LGBTQ aims) and converting to Christianity – brings a powerful perspective to the topic of hospitality that many of us should pause and consider: “Love the

sinner, hate your own sin” (32).³ Having previously been on the receiving end of Christian condemnation, Butterfield’s contention is that for far too long Christians have feared *the appearance of* approving sinful practices. The unintentional result of this posture is the setting up of invisible, yet very real, walls around our homes (and even churches) that unwittingly keep our neighbors at arm’s length. This withdrawal from relationship is a contradiction to the clear message of the Bible that we were all once strangers, separated from God, and in need rescue. Butterfield calls believers to repentance for often times viewing ourselves as morally superior and forgetting that our own reformed confessions boldly proclaim we are unable to save ourselves. Her admonition is for believers to stop “thinking of conversations with [our] neighbors as sneaky evangelistic raids into their sinful lives” (54). Instead, she asserts we must begin to listen, respect, and genuinely care for them.

In the chapter “Our Post-Christian World” Butterfield lays out the argument that many times we miss the intrinsic value of our neighbors when we attempt to share the gospel without taking the time to get to know and listen to them, *without an agenda*. Christians make a mistake when they treat other human beings, created in God’s image, as projects or ministries. If you have ever been on the receiving end of this attitude, you inherently know what I mean – it is demeaning, belittling, and leaves you feeling used. No one wants to be a number in a system or another check mark on someone’s duty of “sharing the good news.” Butterfield asserts that how we view our neighbors is essential, and “if the gospel comes with a house key, then the people in the house are not primarily instrumentally useful but rather inherently valuable” (96). Loving others and treating them as valuable human beings in need of relationship is more impactful to kingdom work than the number of recorded sinner’s prayers we have collected.

From stories of her experiences in adoption and foster care to opening her home for weekly neighborhood meals, Butterfield shares how daily hospitality is neither glamorous nor without sacrifice. Her use of the word “radical” is not to depict larger-than-life or heroic work but is a call to profoundly notice those around us. To have an impact she did not move to another country, but she did walk across the street to get know Hank, a troubled neighbor that no one else befriended. In place of gossiping about him to her more “respectable neighbors,” she reached out to him with kindness and acceptance. Likewise, her home and kitchen didn’t exist to impress with Pottery Barn furniture or Instagram-able meals. Rather, she used what she already had with the purpose to simply serve, requiring a sacrificial increase in her grocery budget to have enough to share. She also did not hire a nanny to shield her children from the messiness of dining with sinners, but fearlessly taught them about what it means to struggle so that “repentance [could be seen] as a Christian fruit, not a social shame” (212).

You may, as I did, get half way through the book and be overwhelmed by her ability to be so productive (homeschooling, baking bread, hosting regular meals, writing books, etc.), but Butterfield makes it clear in her last few chapters that the point of the book is not for you to mimic her form of hospitality.⁴ Instead, she paints a vision for believers to see how they can live out the second greatest commandment to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:31). She guides us as readers to ask these questions: What does God have for me right now, in this

season of life? How am I called to be brave and proactively seek out those who God has placed near me?

When we consider the statistics about Millennials and Gen Z, it is easy to feel discouraged or long for a different time. But Butterfield argues that we should put aside any sentimental longing for the “good-old-days” of American Christianity and instead join her on the front lines of hospitality. Our Christian witness is not merely dogma in a vacuum, nor is Christian hospitality a take-it-or-leave-it Christian practice but rather one of the main foundations of Christian living. These young people are statistically the [loneliest generations](#) and looking for a place to be heard, known, and loved. Through the power of Holy Spirit, we can be the ones to rise up and give them a place to belong through the practice of authentic, Christian hospitality.

As Butterfield suggests, maybe it is time for us to ask ourselves some challenging questions: Have we neglected our non-Christian neighbors, co-workers, classmates, and family members by not recognizing them, or are we taking the time to genuinely know and embrace them? Have we wounded our non-believing friends by requiring moral transformation before we bring them to our family table, or do we dare dine with sinners? And are we ready to risk our time, money, reputations, and lives to love our neighbors as sacrificially Christ has done for us?

If I could speak all the languages of earth and of angels, but didn't love others, I would only be a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I understood all of God's secret plans and possessed all knowledge, and if I had such faith that I could move mountains, but didn't love others, I would be nothing. If I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrificed my body, I could boast about it; but if I didn't love others, I would have gained nothing. (1 Cor. 13:1-5, *New Living Translation*)

FOOTNOTES

1. <https://www.barna.com/research/atheism-doubles-among-generation-z/>
2. <https://rosariabutterfield.com/biography>
3. For her whole conversion story see her first book, [The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert](#).
4. Some may argue that Butterfield is outlining hospitality as only working in a “traditional” household of a working father and stay-at-home mother. While she does present

a complementarian viewpoint, I do not believe that is the major argument of her book.