

**Title: You're Welcome!****[Slide 1]****Text: Romans 12:13 and Genesis 18:1-15****Hospitality****Air bed and breakfast, anyone?**

In 2007 Brian Chesky and Joe Gebbia found themselves in San Francisco with not enough money to pay the rent. When they noticed that area hotels were completely booked for a major convention, they came up with a whacky idea: Why not buy some air beds, set them up in their apartment, and then offer people a place to sleep plus breakfast? They put up a website named "Air Bed and Breakfast" and booked their first three customers.

So how much were those three airbeds worth? Well, the little enterprise that began with perhaps \$150 worth of inflatable mattresses is now worth over \$31 billion. And 3 guests have become 500,000 *per night*. One apartment has become 640,000 hosts. Over 160 million guests have signed up for "Air Bed and Breakfast," now known as simply Airbnb.

**Three Visitors:**

People have been hosting guests for a very long time. Many cultures place a very high value on extending hospitality to strangers. The culture of the ancient near east is no exception. Witness the story of Abraham and his 3 visitors:

**[Slide 2]**

*Genesis 18:1-5 NIV*

*The LORD appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground.*

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*He said, "If I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, do not pass your servant by. Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree. Let me get you something to eat, so you can be refreshed and then go on your way – now that you have come to your servant."*

*"Very well," they answered, "do as you say."*

### **Hospitality:**

The story begins with the narrator letting us in on a secret: "The LORD appeared to Abraham..." We know what Abraham had no way of knowing, namely that his guests were far more than a small group of Bedouin traveling on foot through the countryside.

Abraham rolled out the red carpet for them, not because he expected anything from them, but because he was determined to treat them the way he would wish to be treated if he were hot, hungry, thirsty, and far from home.

He commanded his wife Sarah to bake bread while he oversaw the preparation of a tender calf. No hot dogs and chips for these guests. They got the prime rib dinner:

### **[Slide 4]**

*Genesis 18:8 NIV*

*He then brought some curds and milk and the calf that had been prepared, and set these before them. While they ate, he stood near them under a tree.*

He didn't even share the meal with them, choosing instead to be their waiter! Little did he know, but this seemingly chance encounter with the 3 strangers brought with it the fulfillment of a blessing beyond his wildest dreams.

## **The Last Laugh**

### **The visitors' question:**

It turned out that the visitors had come on a mission. As they ate their dinner, they asked about Abraham's wife:

**[Slide 5]**

*Genesis 18:9 NIV*

*"Where is your wife Sarah?" they asked him.*

*"There, in the tent," he said.*

Then one of the visitors made an astounding announcement:

*Genesis 18:10 NIV*

*Then one of them said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son."*

*Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent which was behind him.*

The LORD had made a promise to Abraham many years before that he and Sarah would have a child and that their family line would become a great nation that would inherit the land where they were living. As the years had passed, the promise had seemed more and more impossible – outlandish, even. As the writer of Genesis reminds us, they were "already very old, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing." (Genesis 18:11 NIV)

**Sarah's response:**

For Sarah, listening to the conversation from inside the tent, this was all too much!

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*Genesis 18:12 NIV*

*So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, "After I am worn out and my lord is old, will I now have this pleasure?"*

Poor Sarah! She must have wondered, "Who are these guys who wandered into our encampment, anyway? I don't know them and they don't know me. What business do they have even bringing up this subject? The whole thing is preposterous. Too crazy to even cry about anymore. Are you kidding me?"

"Why don't they just eat the free food and get on their way?"

## **The last laugh:**

But the visitor who asked the question about Sarah wasn't finished yet:

### **[Slide 7]**

*Genesis 18:13-14 NIV*

*Then the LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Will I really have a child, now that I am old?' Is anything too hard for the LORD? I will return to you at the appointed time next year, and Sarah will have a son."*

A voice came from inside the tent:

### **[Slide 8]**

*Genesis 18:15 NIV*

*Sarah was afraid, so she lied and said, "I did not laugh."*

*But he said, "Yes, you did laugh."*

Who says God doesn't have a sense of humor? And you never know when He might show up.

## **You're Welcome**

### **Love in action:**

Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome that their love had to be sincere. He commanded them to be "devoted to one another in love." One of the ways that we show that kind of love is through doing what Abraham did. Paul says:

### **[Slide 9]**

*Romans 12:13 NIV*

*Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.*

The writer to the Hebrews says:

**[Slide 10]**

*Hebrews 13:1-2 NIV*

*Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters. Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.*

Hospitality to angels? Sounds a whole lot like what happened when Abraham welcomed the 3 strangers. In fact, one of them turned out to be none other than the LORD Himself!

The LORD Himself weighed in on the subject when Jesus said:

**[Slide 11]**

*Matthew 25:35,40 NIV*

*"For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in..."*

*"Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these my brothers and sisters of mine, **you did for me.**"*

Love in action can have an impact far beyond what we might have ever imagined. When we practice hospitality, we welcome Jesus Himself into our space.

**God's 'airbnb'**

God has called us to be *His Airbnb*. He didn't build any fancy spiritual hotels. He doesn't charge the going rate. Instead, He has created a world-wide network of hosts. And best of all, when the guests arrive, He comes too!

Next Tuesday night we have the awesome privilege of welcoming the families of Franklin County to our house. For a couple of hours they will come through the front doors and explore the various rooms, get free candy and food. The kids will be in a safe, inviting place with lots of fun things to do.

To make it happen, we need you. We need you to help with everything from bringing candy and helping with the decorating of the church to being here on Halloween to welcome and serve our guests.

And remember, our most important Guest will come in costume. Because when we serve "the least of these" we are actually serving Him!