# Lord of Our Living Spaces

Michael d'Offay 1 September 2020

When Jesus becomes our Lord, He begins the lifelong project of ruling in our hearts and also in our homes. The rightful King of the universe wants to use our lives and our living spaces as tools in His hands. Nevertheless, the old saying, 'A man's home is his castle' speaks of a worldly attitude that is often found in us. We want to be the rulers of our private homes and no one can tell us what to do there. And we are reluctant for others to see how we really live. We need to be reminded that our homes are given by God not just for ourselves but for others. In this article we look afresh at the Biblical value of meeting in homes and how God uses this for our growth and His glory.

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## Where the Early Believers Met Together

A sweep of the gospels shows that Jesus purposefully spent a significant amount of time in homes teaching, evangelising and also resting (Matthew 26:6, Luke 10:38, 14:1, John 12:1). And there were some homes to which He loved to return, such as the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus in Bethany.

## Meeting in Public

Acts gives us a snapshot of the first believers in Jerusalem meeting publicly in Solomon's colonnade and in homes. Solomon's colonnade was a large public area traditionally used by rabbis for teaching, but interestingly it was also where the early Christians gathered to listen to the apostles teach and see the power of God demonstrated (Acts 5:12).

## Meeting in Homes

Even so, it was in their homes where the nitty-gritty of discipleship took place: prayer, communion, communal meals and sharing life together (Acts 2:46, 12:12). Is this because homes were somehow more holy or sacred to God? No, they met in homes rather because it was the simplest and most accessible place open for believers to share life. It remains the same to this day.

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## Church Buildings Became Holy

So for the first 300 years of early Christianity, the people of God primarily met in homes (Romans 16:5, 1 Corinthians 16:19, Colossians 4:15). But as the church became more formalised from the time of Constantine, so church buildings became more prominent, elaborate and set apart for holy use. And as churches become more institutional, so the use of homes diminished. Growing up as a Catholic, this picture of the church as a holy place was my understanding of it, and the actual buildings seemed very sacred as we 'went to church'. I didn't understand the truth that church is a people in whom God dwells, not a physical place (Ephesians 2:19–22).

# Don't Throw the Church Baby Out

Now some want to throw the baby out with the bathwater and declare that we should have no church buildings nor specific days of worship. This is because, firstly, the early church seemed much more organic (meeting daily and in homes) and secondly, it had all been seemingly corrupted by Constantine's controlling hand.

A healthier perspective, however, is to acknowledge that we do need public spaces (church buildings) in which to gather large groups together like the early church did in Solomon's colonnade. And we also need to keep the custom of meeting on Sundays as the early believers did, gathering on the first day of the week as it was the day of Jesus' resurrection (Acts 20:7, 1 Corinthians 16:2). Meeting publicly together on Sundays is one of the building blocks of church

life, but from there we launch into discipleship in our homes between Sundays.

## The Richness of Meeting in Homes

Wouldn't it be incredible to have Jesus Himself come into our homes, just as Martha invited the Lord to her house? (Luke 10:38) However, every time we have a fellow believer in our home, it is as if we are inviting Jesus Himself (Matthew 25:35). This astounding truth reveals the spiritual richness that takes place when we meet in our homes. We invite people into our lives when we do so, especially outside of formal meeting times.

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## Leading by Example

For mature believers and leaders in church life, we dare not forget the power of example. People imitate our lives and our faith (1 Thessalonians 1:5, Hebrews 13:7), not through teaching a course or being at a meeting, but in how we behave in the routines, pressures, frustrations and joys of daily life, practicing the presence of God. Often, my most surprising times of encouragement and prayer have taken place around a dinner table or in the kitchen. I grew the most as a young Christian hanging out in the home of mature believers, watching the way the husband treated his wife and his children or listening to him talking about the Lord, and it impacted me deeply. This richness of discipleship can only take place as we open our homes and lives.

## Lockdown Lures

Of course, the lockdown has been a respite for those of us introverts who enjoy privacy. It's not wrong to love our own space, but we are to love the Lord and His people more. Let's remember that our homes are a gift from God to us, our families and also for the people of God to use. And may we continue to offer up our lives and living spaces as effective tools in the hands of our great God.

*Another great resource dealing with the ministry of our homes: https://four12global.com/authors/michaeldoffay/the-art-of-hospitality-in-the-age-of-isolation/