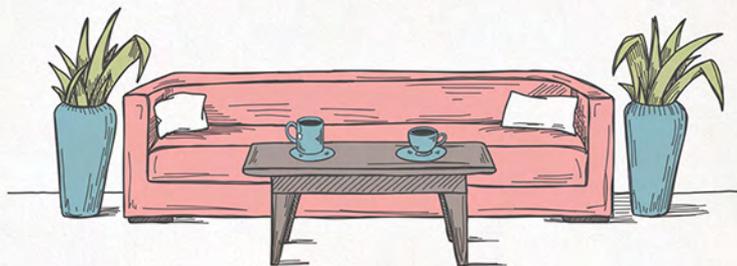


# REACH OUT

gather

# IN



40 DAYS TO OPENING YOUR HEART AND HOME

*New York Times* BESTSELLING AUTHOR

# KAREN EHMAN

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BETHANYHOUSE

*a division of Baker Publishing Group*

Minneapolis, Minnesota

Reach Out, Gather In • Karen Ehman

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Published by Bethany House Publishers  
11400 Hampshire Avenue South  
Bloomington, Minnesota 55438  
www.bethanyhouse.com

Bethany House Publishers is a division of  
Baker Publishing Group, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Printed in the United States of America

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ISBN 978-0-7642-3795-9

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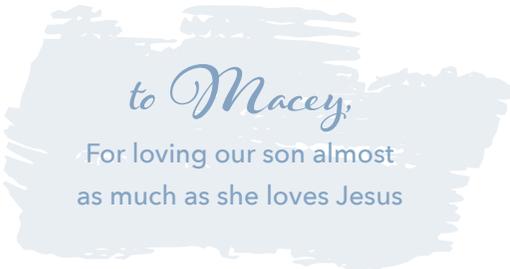
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Cover design by Kara Klontz  
Interior design by William Overbeeke  
Interior art by Sarah Rudkin

Author is represented by Meredith Brock at The Brock Agency.

20 21 22 23 24 25 26      7 6 5 4 3 2 1



*to Macey,*

For loving our son almost  
as much as she loves Jesus

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# Introduction

*H*

i, friend,

With the recent need for social distancing, I quickly discovered that one of the simple activities I missed most was being able to sit in person with someone, sharing a steaming cup of something delicious while also sharing life together. I know this up-close human interaction is a delight I will no longer take for granted.

Today, I so wish you and I were in person together sharing a cup of apple cinnamon herbal tea. Why that particular beverage? Because it was over a cup of this tea, poured for me by a woman named Pat, that I began my walk with God. But this isn't a book about Pat. Or tea. Or me. Or even you.

This book is about Jesus and the people in your life he is longing to reach through you. Those whom you see every day, and those who are there, but you just haven't noticed—yet.

But this is more than a book. It's a challenge—part devotional, part guidebook. Together we will explore not only the “how” of hospitality, but the “why.” Over forty days (designed to be eight weeks of weekdays only), we will study Scripture, take actionable steps, pray, read real-life

examples of hospitality, get our homes ready, try new recipes, and journal our excursions.

I hear from women regularly who wish they were able to creatively love and practically encourage others in their lives. What is holding them back? Yep. You guessed it. They are busy! Holding down jobs. Raising children. Volunteering in their community. Involved in churches and communities. Sounds familiar, doesn't it?

Although you possess a jam-packed schedule, I suspect you also possess a desire to connect with others more deeply, face-to-face and even within the four walls of your home. You may dream of being a world-changer, making your presence really count in the lives of others as you build community with them. The trouble is, you don't know where—or how—to start.

In decades past, using the home and food to show love to others seemed to come naturally; it was woven into the very fiber of a woman's day. But since women today are not necessarily near their kitchens all day long, this assignment can be more challenging.

That's where *Reach Out, Gather In* comes in.

I myself am a mother of three children who has many opportunities for loving, hosting, and feeding people. My mid-century dining-room table is a magnet, attracting many of my children's friends, who hang out at our house or sometimes stop by on their lunch hour to see if they can score a bowl of leftover corn chowder instead of heading for fast-food row. My calendar includes opportunities for taking food to our life group, dropping by a batch of muffins to the teachers' lounge, or making a Crock-Pot of pineapple barbecue pork sandwiches and a platter of apple blondies to welcome the new family who just moved into our neighborhood. As for long-term guests, we've hosted teens and adults for a day—or a year—as they moved into our home and naturally blended into our family.

I've surely made some mistakes. And I've learned a lesson or two along the way. But I hold fast to the truth that God calls us to a life of hospitality, welcoming others into our ordinary lives so they might better know our glorious God.

I'm thrilled you've come along for the challenge. Know that I am cheering you on! My prayer is that by the time you close this book, you will be equipped and inspired. I believe that, by taking this challenge, your home and life will transform into a place where the Gospel is displayed, drawing others closer to Christ and making a difference for eternity.

May God bless you as you open your heart and home to others.

*Karen*

# WHY *Welcome?*



day 1

## Holy Leftovers and Apple Cinnamon Tea

*J*met Jesus over a cup of apple cinnamon herbal tea.

Oh, I don't mean that he and I sat down in the flesh at the local coffeehouse and sipped on hot beverages served in earthenware mugs, purchased with a buy-one-get-one coupon I pulled out of my purse that was about to expire. I mean that a cup of spiced tea—served to me by a believer with a heart of hospitality in her oh-so-ordinary home—was the means God used to draw me to himself, setting in motion my spiritual walk of faith.

I was a sixteen-year-old junior in high school when a new family moved in just across the road. Their white ranch-style house nestled up next to the country church that stood guard over the four-corner Midwestern intersection I called home. The wife was a stay-at-home mom of two small children, who also headed up the church's youth group. Her

husband was the newly hired preacher. She first noticed me outside in my front yard, tossing a softball up in the air all by myself. Miss Pat made it her mission to get to know me.

She invited me to hang out at her home on weekdays when I was finished with my after-school activities. There wasn't a fuss made. No pulling out of all the stops to impress my teenaged self. She simply invited me to pull up a chair and join in the daily happenings of her very commonplace life.

She would pour me a steaming hot cup of apple cinnamon tea and offer me a snack—often fashioned from leftovers from her family's supper the evening before. At this house, I felt welcomed and safe. This led to something even more crucial—I felt loved and known. She took time to get to know the real me, not just the public me—an overachiever whose list of accomplishments and activities was the longest in my entire class of nearly six hundred students. She instead unearthed the private me—a lonely young woman who was sorely unsure of herself, desperate for attention and affirmation.

Since she'd already picked up on the fact that I liked to play softball, she invited me not only to attend youth group but also to be part of the church's softball team. Through her invites I became instantly connected to this pint-sized church with a humongous heart. Soon I was told the Gospel story. How Christ took my place on the cross, paying the penalty for my sin and purchasing my way to heaven. Oh, I had been told the story many times before by my mother, who was a believer. But up until that time, for me Jesus stayed conveniently closed up in the pages of the Bible that sat upon my shelf, only occasionally coming out in my mind at Christmas and Eastertime.

Then, after a few months of attending that church, I responded to the Spirit's invitation and placed my trust in Jesus at a youth retreat campfire one September Saturday night.

My life has never been the same.

God can use anything and anyone. He has no limits. He can—and often does—use a flawlessly presented worship experience—one that rivals the most elaborately orchestrated concert—to beckon someone to himself. He can reach a lost or weary soul through a television show or radio broadcast. He might pique a person's interest in spiritual matters through the written word on the pages of a book or pamphlet. But I find that—most often—the Lord uses everyday relationships to expand his kingdom.

I once took an impromptu poll of the people in my Bible study group, asking them how they first came to faith. Of the nearly thirty people in attendance, all but one had first responded to the Gospel and made a decision to become a Christ-follower because of a relationship with someone in their everyday life. (One person had begun their walk with God due to listening to Christian radio.) For some it was a neighbor, co-worker, or other person they personally knew. For others it was a stranger-turned-friend who first opened their heart—and often their home—to them as they naturally shared about their relationship with Christ. These people gave them a front-row seat in their ordinary life. There they observed God intricately involved in the daily life of a human in a captivating way that made them want a relationship with him too.

The New Testament is full of accounts of people coming to faith. In 1 Thessalonians, we catch a very important fact about this phenomenon. Lives were not transformed solely because information about Jesus was

shared—although there is no doubt that information about the Gospel is required. A catalyst for the conversion is tucked away in chapter 2, where we find Paul talking about the spiritual growth of those he loved who comprised this early church congregation.

Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, so we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well.

1 Thessalonians 2:7–8 NIV

Did you catch it? They shared not only their words. They shared their very lives.

In the original Greek language in which the New Testament was written, the word rendered *lives* doesn't just denote the happenings in the course of someone's day. It goes further. The word used, *psuché*, is derived from the root word *psyxō*, which means "to breathe, blow."<sup>1</sup>

Does it make you think of any English words? If you guessed *psyche* or *psychology*, you are correct. This word encapsulates what we know as the human soul (or psyche). It refers to one's distinctive personality or unique personhood. It is who someone is at their very core.

As we, like the apostle Paul, open our hearts, connecting our souls with another's through the sharing of life, we create a safe space where the Gospel can be displayed, and God's table expanded. Others can come to know Christ through this simple soul sharing.

Soul sharing isn't as complicated as we make it out to be. It needn't be expensive. Or labor-intensive. It isn't fancy or flashy. What is it, then?

Soul sharing is caring for the deepest part of another as you share with them your material possessions—as well as your time—in a way that points them to Jesus. It is how the family of God welcomes another.

And, it reminds us of those who have paved the way before us, inviting us to share in the Gospel as well. It is the most exciting of commonplace adventures that results in lives affected for eternity.

Are you ready to watch God work, fetching souls and knitting them to himself? If so, then fire up the stove, put the teakettle on, and watch with eager anticipation for whomever God sends your way.



*My*  
**ONE-SENTENCE PRAYER**  
FOR THE WEEK

At the beginning of each section of this book, you will be asked to write a one-sentence prayer for the week, encapsulating what you hope to learn and apply. Go ahead and do so for day one in the space provided below, asking God to help you catch a passion for soul sharing.

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## day 2

# But Do I Have To?

**B**ut, Mom, do I *have* to?” Boy, did my kids utter those words hundreds of times over the years! Whether it was when I announced it was time to do their schoolwork, tidy up their bedrooms, or pile in the Buick to go somewhere, they sometimes pushed back, testing whether what I had just instructed them to do was optional or actually obligatory. Usually it was the latter.

There are numerous subjects that present themselves in the pages of Scripture that evoke a similar response from us as believers. When we read Jesus’ admonition in Luke 6:27 to “love your enemies,” our immediate thought may be, “Are ya crazy?” In that same passage—part of the famous Sermon on the Mount—we are also instructed in verse 28 to bless those who curse us. Uh . . . blessing them isn’t exactly what we had in mind. And then we read these words in 1 Peter 4:9–10:

Be hospitable to one another without complaining. Just as each one has received a gift, use it to serve others, as good stewards of the varied grace of God.

*Be hospitable.* But it is so much work! And quite a bit of hassle. It interrupts my plans and cramps what little style I may have.

But the Bible is one step ahead of us. As if anticipating the grumbling rolling around in our brains and eventually emitting from our lips, it overlays it with a little caveat: *without complaining.*

*Busted.*

When met with our choruses of “But, Jesus, do I *have* to?” the resounding answer is yes. First Peter 4:9 isn’t a sweet suggestion. We aren’t told to think about maybe opening our hearts and homes sometime. You know, in case one day we happen to feel like it. First Peter 4:9 not only assumes that we will offer hospitality but tells us how we are to do it: no griping allowed.

The word translated as “complaining” (or in some Bible versions as “grumbling”) is the Greek word *goggysmós*. It cracked me up the first time I saw that word printed in the English transliteration. No matter how I tried to pronounce it, I couldn’t. And each stab I took at it sounded just like the concept it was meant to portray. It sounds like a person grumbling and protesting, mumbling their immense annoyance.

Actually, this term doesn’t just refer to our audible complaints about an action we are asked to perform. It carries the concept of secrecy too—of muttering and murmuring under our breath, expressing a secret displeasure that is not openly asserted. The contrast of such a cantankerous attitude is to perform a task joyfully, with a cheerful mind and disposition.

I think the concept of hospitality is often misunderstood. When you think of the word *hospitality*, what comes to mind?

Entertaining in your perfectly cleaned home, complete with stunning, high-end décor?

A gourmet meal that rivals something straight out of a Food Network special?

A formal invitation with a planned-out menu and carefully thought-out conversation starters?

The biblical concept of hospitality is straightforward in its definition. The original word is *philoxenos*. It is a combination of two other words: *philos* and *xenos*. *Philos* means love, and *xenos* means stranger. Hospitality is simply loving strangers and continuing to love them until the strangers become friends. There is no mention of a menu, no talk of home design.

I would run out of fingers and toes if I tried to use them to count all of the former strangers who are now my friends. These souls I got to know by inviting them over to our home—or I became acquainted with them by being hospitable somewhere other than within my four walls. (More ideas on that coming later!)

Stranger love isn't the only aspect of hospitality. Scripture also tethers this topic to loving fellow believers in passages such as Romans 12:13 and Romans 16:23. Hospitality is a tool we can use to serve those we barely know or to minister to our closest friends. And it can be a powerful means of building up those in our local church as we offer our homes as venues where our spiritual community can flourish and care for each other.



Today, let's take some time to think through how this command of offering hospitality fits into your life. And—if you are up for it—take the challenge to memorize a verse that pertains to this important practice in the life of a follower of Christ.

Record your responses in the spaces provided. For the memory verse, turn to page 249, where all of the suggested memory verses have been designed for you and are ready to be utilized to help you cement the verses in your mind, write them on your heart, and then live them out.

## Ponder AND Pray

Before reading this day's entry, how would you have defined the word *hospitality*?

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Knowing now that the chief concept of biblical hospitality is the love of strangers, have you ever been the recipient of such love by someone you barely knew welcoming you into their home? Describe it here.

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What keeps you from opening your own home to others, especially those you don't know very well? List as many reasons (dare I say excuses?) as you can below.

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## Study AND Store

### Memory Verse 1

Be *hospitable* to one another without complaining.  
Just as each one has received a *gift*, use it to serve  
others, as good stewards of the varied grace of *God*.

1 PETER 4:9-10



## day 3

# Open Your Gift (and Then Give It Away!)

*J* can hardly wait for the white-elephant gift exchange my father's side of the family has as a tradition on Christmas Eve each year. Guests at this wacky party draw numbers out of a basket. Then they proceed in numerical order to open up one of the goofy wrapped gifts they have each brought for the occasion. What a blast it is to see what outlandish present each person gets, usually snagged at a secondhand store or yard sale.

But seeing the zany presents—perhaps a neon purple planter shaped like an owl, or a relic gizmo or gadget from an infomercial of decades past—isn't the only fun part. Things start getting really exciting—and in our family, sometimes even intense—when people are allowed to “steal” someone else's gift based on what number they drew.

Our family has gotten a bit cutthroat when stealing some of the items over the years. Not content with what they opened, they instead desired whatever object was deemed to be the zaniest of that year's collection.

Each of us as believers has been fashioned by God in a unique way, complete with natural talents and spiritual gifts. Sometimes it is tempting to look at somebody else with their unique package of strengths and abilities and wish that we possessed it.

I know I've spent way too much time wishing I had someone else's gifting. Sometimes I wished for a natural knack they had. I remember one woman in particular who was so fabulous at all things crafty. She could sew. She made her own greeting cards. She could take raw materials that were lying around the house and whip up something that was not only functional, but beautiful as well. I, on the other hand, do not have an ounce of crafter's blood coursing through my veins. Why, my own children knew better than to bring me a badge to sew onto their uniforms when they were younger. I would reach for the hot-glue gun! In our house, Dad was the master seamstress.

In time, through the encouragement of some older Christians who listened to my struggles with gift envy, I finally came to the place where I decided to discover—and then be content with—my specific wiring when it came to natural talents and spiritual gifts. How freeing this was! Rather than looking at one of my siblings in Christ, longing to do ministry the way they did, I instead embarked on an exciting journey, observing God use me as he touched the lives of others.

Our focus verse for this section (which I have encouraged you to memorize, if you have time) is 1 Peter 4:9–10: “Be hospitable to one another without complaining. Just as each one has received a gift, use it to serve others, as good stewards of the varied grace of God.” We've already discussed being hospitable without grousing about it. Today, let's focus on verse 10 in this passage, which talks about each of us receiving a gift.

What is the purpose of that gift? Is it so we can pat ourselves on the back for having it? Nope. The gift really isn't given for our benefit. Look again at what it says: . . . **“use it to serve others.”**

You are not the intended recipient of your gift. The people in your life are. Your gift is a tool God will use to serve others, building them up and helping them to find their place in his kingdom.

The original word *gift* in this passage is the Greek word *charisma*. This noun, in essence, denotes an endowment of grace intended to edify the church, a Holy Spirit-powered service to the body of believers to carry out God's plan for his people. Verse 10 also implies that we don't all have identical gifts. There is nothing matchy-matchy about the ways we serve. We are stewards of “the varied grace of God.” The word *varied* here in the original language is *poikilos*—perhaps my favorite word of this verse. It means—wait for it—many-colored, diverse, and manifold.

Okay, perhaps the word *manifold* threw you. I myself don't have a whole lot of knowledge of this word. I remember singing the hymn “Great Is Thy Faithfulness” that has a line that states “join with all nature in manifold witness.” I surmised that manifold meant many . . . maybe?

Additionally, because my husband, my son, my brother, and my step-brother all build cars for a living, I know there is a car part called a manifold. Maybe its definition can help shed some light on this concept. It is:

A system of pipes that divides a flow and carries it to more than one place or that brings a flow from a number of places to a single place.<sup>1</sup>

What an accurate depiction of what our gifts do for the family of God! When we divide, we maximize, carrying the love of God to more than

one place, compounding the impact we have on the lives of those within our sphere of influence.

This makes me think about the concept of being fishers of people, which is how Jesus referred to us in Matthew 4:19: “‘Follow me,’ he told them, ‘and I will make you fish for people.’”

I have a tad bit of experience with fishing. My aunt and uncle live on a lake, and their entire family—kids and grandkids included—are avid fishers. I know from watching them that you don’t use the same bait for every species of fish. You mix it up: Red worms for catching trout. Leeches for luring walleye. Minnows for snagging largemouth bass. (Why am I suddenly craving a fish sandwich with extra tartar sauce?)

In real life, we are to fish for people. Therefore, we also need to mix it up when it comes to what will lure them to Christ. God, in his infinite wisdom, knows exactly what type of people will be drawn to his heart through the gifts, abilities, and resources each of us possesses.

Make it your aim not only to discover, but to embrace and then use your gifts.



## Ponder AND Pray

Time to focus on your distinctive wiring. Each of us has natural abilities and talents, along with spiritual gifts. God will use the beautiful package that is you to reach others, whether they are already believers or have yet to hear the good news of the Gospel. Take a few moments to work through the following questions, designed to help you pinpoint these qualities you already possess.

Has there ever been a time when someone commented on a natural ability you have? What was it? How did it make you feel when they pointed out that you possess this quality?

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What passions do you have that God could use to serve others? Examples: You enjoy caring for children; you are skilled at painting and hanging wallpaper; you are an efficient house cleaner or a tremendous cook; you are an excellent gardener or automotive mechanic. List three to five passions or hobbies that could be used to serve others in the space below.

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Now, have you ever explored what spiritual gift you might possess? (You will find these gifts listed in the Bible in the following passages: Romans 12:6-8 and 1 Corinthians 12:4-11, 28.) Flip open your Bible—or

tap your way if you use a digital form of Scripture—and read through these passages. Record any initial thoughts about these gifts below.

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What experience do you have with spiritual gifts? Have you ever made a concerted effort to discover which ones you have? If so, list the gift or gifts you have below. (If not, check out the resources section on page 246 to see my go-to sites and books on the topic.)

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## TAKE ROOT *and* TAKE ACTION

Look back over the section above. Identify one of the qualities that make up your unique personality. It could be a natural ability, passion, hobby, or spiritual gift. Below, write a goal that pertains to this gift. For example, “I want to be more deliberate to use my love of cooking to serve others in my life who are dealing with medical issues or are hurting or grieving.”

Remember, your gift is God’s grace, scattered about to reach others for his glory.