

“In this heartfelt, clear, and convicting book, Jen wonderfully shows us the importance of welcoming others as Christ has welcomed us. Through biblical insight, lived experience, and encouraging stories of her dear friends welcoming people in many different contexts, Jen gives the reader space to contemplate the importance of being a welcoming people and a welcoming church, not only on a Sunday but every day, and not only for the growth of your church but for the growth of the kingdom worldwide. This is a book that I want to put into the hands of every member of my church.”

STEVE ROBINSON, Senior Pastor, Cornerstone Church Liverpool, UK; Director, Acts 29 Great Britain

“The most welcoming place on the planet should be the church, and the most welcoming people on the planet should be Christians. Why? So that sinners can hear the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ. In *Welcome*, we are invited to fling open the doors of the church and open the doors of our lives so that all people will have the chance to hear about who Jesus is and what he has accomplished for a lost and dying world.”

J.T. ENGLISH, Lead Pastor, Storyline Fellowship, Arvada, Colorado; Author, *Deep Discipleship: How the Church Can Make Whole Disciples of Jesus*

“Jen offers theological reasons and practical action steps for churches and individuals wanting to practice the radical welcome of Jesus on a regular basis in their local church community. This book will encourage and equip you to see yourself as a partner with God in his kingdom work—on Sundays and beyond!”

AMY GANNETT, Author, *Fix Your Eyes: How Our Study of God Shapes Our Worship of Him*

“*Welcome* provides biblical encouragement to mirror the work of our kind and hospitable God. Jen Oshman encourages readers to sacrificially welcome others as Christ welcomed us. I want to give every member of my local church a copy of this compelling book!”

HUNTER BELESS, Host, Journeywomen Podcast; Author, *Read It, See It, Say It, Sing It!*

“The gospel should create a culture of welcome (Romans 15:7) so that the local church is, as Jen Oshman beautifully puts it, ‘a porch light in a dark night.’ This is all the more important in a time of deep loneliness and fragmentation. This wonderful book will help both church leaders and regular members build a culture in their churches that reflects the welcome of the gospel. It is filled with practical ideas, biblical and historical wisdom, and counsel that touches the heart. Highly recommended!”

GAVIN ORTLUND, Pastor, First Baptist Church of Ojai, California;
Author, *Why God Makes Sense in a World That Doesn't*

“Those who have experienced God’s extravagant welcome in Christ should be obsessed with sharing it as widely and generously as we can. Yet it is easy to be inward-focused, comfortable in our church communities, and blind to the needs of our neighbours—and to the barriers that get in the way of them joining us. Jen Oshman draws on the Scriptures and her own experiences of church-planting and cross-cultural missions to show how our churches can be places of welcome and belonging for everyone. Written with warmth and wisdom, this book will inspire and equip individuals and church families to reflect the welcome of our Saviour.”

CAROLYN LACEY, Women’s Worker, Woodgreen Church, Worcester,
UK; Author, *Extraordinary Hospitality (for Ordinary People)*

“Quality welcome, quality teaching, and quality hospitality are three key ingredients of a flourishing church. Jen highlights the two of these that all Christians need to reflect in their personal lives if the body of Christ is to demonstrate his grace. She reminds us that the God who has welcomed us—welcomed you!—can use us to welcome others. What a privilege that is. How significant that is! So, read this book and absorb some of Jen’s lovely insights.”

RAY EVANS, FIEC Leadership Consultant, and formerly Lead Pastor
at Grace Community Church, Bedford, UK



welcome

JEN OSHMAN

the goodbook
COMPANY



Welcome:

Loving Your Church by Making Space for Everyone

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*For Redemption Parker
You welcome so well*

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FOREWORD

BY TIM CHALLIES

Of all the tasks that may fall to me on a Sunday morning, my favorite is to stand by the doors of the church, greet people as they arrive, and welcome them to our worship service. I'm not the most outgoing person in the world, so it's not like this comes naturally. I'm not the most loquacious person in the world, so it's not like the words flow easily. But it has still become my favorite task because I believe in it so deeply.

As I stand there, I have the privilege of greeting people who are very much like me and people who are very different. I welcome those who are young and those who are old, those who have served Christ for decades and those who have known him for only a week. I welcome those who are dear friends and those I have never met, those who have resided in my country for their entire lives and those who have only just arrived. I welcome the strong and the weak, the happy and the sad, the well-known and the anonymous, the believer and the unbeliever. And I welcome them all to join in

the same activity in the same place and for the same purpose. There's something so sweetly unifying about it, something so deeply moving.

That simple welcome is not merely a means to usher people from the front door to their seat. Its value is not merely practical. Rather, it is a picture—a picture of something much greater, a symbol of something much more precious. In its own way, that welcome represents God's welcome to those he loves. As I welcome people to Grace Fellowship Church, I am reminding them of the way God welcomes them into his kingdom. As I welcome people to this brief time of worship, I am reminding them that God welcomes them into an eternity of worship. Isn't it so often true of God's ways that something that appears so small can actually mean so much?

In this short but meaty book—one that mines deep truths from Scripture and then applies them in very practical ways—Jen Oshman wants you to consider that because God has welcomed you, it falls to you to welcome others. Not only that, but in the way God has welcomed you, he now calls you to welcome them. The God who has related to you with such kindness, such generosity, such magnanimity now calls you to relate to others likewise.

Of course this goes far beyond taking your post at the front doors of the church for 30 minutes on the occasional Sunday morning. It extends to what happens before the service but also during and after it. It extends to how

you behave in the church but also to how you behave in the home and neighborhood. It directs the way you relate to friends but also to strangers and even enemies. It impacts your hospitality and your evangelism, your weekdays as much as your weekends.

It turns out that a true welcome is not just a hand extended on a Sunday morning but a way to live the Christian life. I'm thankful for this book and gladly commend it to you. May you read it and then prayerfully consider how to do it—how to welcome others with all the joy, all the devotion, with which God has welcomed you.

Tim Challies
Blogger and author;
Elder, Grace Fellowship Church, Toronto
August 2022

INTRODUCTION

I remember being on a mission trip years ago and chatting with another woman on the team as we waited to board our plane from Japan to Thailand. We were living in Japan at the time, ministering to the American military stationed there. The mission team was made up of men and women from all military branches and ranks—everything from a newly enlisted Marine up to a high-ranking Air Force officer, and a wide variety in between.

My friend and teammate Jenna remarked, “We have a pretty weird team here. I can’t imagine seeing a group of people like this anywhere else.” And she was right. Not only did the team members come from all branches and ranks, but they hailed from all over the United States and represented a number of ethnicities. What we felt even more, though, was the diversity in personalities. As members of the same church family, we not only met every weekend for worship, but we had been

participating in various team-building activities and planning meetings for months. We all knew each other well at this point. And, I'll be honest, some people were easier to be around than others.

This truth was veiled in Jenna's comment. She didn't say it out loud, but we gave one another knowing looks and stifled a giggle. Our team included some tough and sometimes unpredictable personalities. Melding together strong people from so many backgrounds was indeed a wonder.

My husband, who was sitting a chair or two away from us, picked up on our conversation. He said with a knowing grin, "Yeah. You don't get to pick your family, do you?"

We both smiled and sighed and shook our heads. "No, you sure don't," Jenna said.

My own family flooded my thoughts. I have some crazy cousins, let me tell you. My aunts and uncles all live very different lives, spread out all over the United States. My own brother and I couldn't be more different. Our dad was an only child from a quiet family, and our mom is the oldest of five, and we have more than 30 cousins on her side. People in my family are all over the place when it comes to personalities, strengths, joys, sorrows, work ethic, values, and demeanor.

And it's true, I didn't choose this family. You could say it chose me. Or more accurately, God himself chose it for me. In his goodness and providence, he ordained that I would

share my blood, family tree, dysfunction, and celebrations with these people. We don't get to pick our family.

This is true of our church family too. We Christians don't choose each other. We didn't even choose Christ; he chose us. And he made us forever part of his people, on earth and in heaven. We are siblings in the global Christian family, joined together by the Son, indwelt by the Spirit, and under the sovereign goodness of the Father.

Our global faith family is made up of millions of local faith families—local churches. As you think about your own local church, I imagine you have feelings similar to those described above; some members of the family are easier to be around than others. You find some members so like-minded that it's natural and just plain fun to be with them. Others view the world in ways so different from you that you are tempted to dismiss them or at least avoid them. This much is sure: you don't select the people who join your local church—God does that. And he makes a family that is at times delightful, and at other times requires patience and tenacity and trust that God really does know what he's doing. Our local faith families are beautiful and good and hard and quirky and stretching and everything in between.

And this crazy, beautiful family that you and I are in is all because of one thing: the radical welcome of Jesus. Because of the Father's great love and endless mercy, he sacrificed his own Son to welcome us in. In Christ's death and resurrection, you and I are reconciled, made new, and

made family. We are adopted sons and daughters, heirs together in Christ. Jesus stopped at nothing to welcome us into the family.

And he says to you and me: *Go and do likewise.*

As we have been welcomed, so we must welcome. Our God, who made space for you and me, asks us to make space for everyone, so that they can hear and respond to his good news.

Yet that's not always easy, is it? While you may love your church family fiercely, welcoming outsiders in can sometimes feel awkward and daunting. Church feels outdated and irrelevant to so many. In the post-Christian West, we who attend worship services on Sundays are not the norm. It is nothing short of a leap of faith to invite an outsider into your local church. If you bring a friend to church, you wonder how they will be welcomed in. Will anyone even talk to them? Or will they be ignored or quietly sidelined because they don't fit in? Will they find church to be what so many of those outside of it suspect it of being: stuffy or cliquey or cold?

May it never be. Jesus *really* is the way, the truth, and the life. His Word *really* is the word of life. And the church *really* is God's plan for imparting healing and goodness and beauty to the world. Brothers and sisters, we have an opportunity now to be a porch light in a dark night. The brokenness of the world swirls around us. So many on our streets and in our workplaces are suffering: buckling

under the weight of sickness or broken relationships or unmet expectations, just trying to make sense of it all. We long to love them and serve them and help them.

But how? How might we welcome the people of our communities into our church services and ultimately into the very family of God? How might we put the always-needed, eternally relevant, forever-glorious love of Jesus on display so that others might be brought in? How can we make space for everyone?

As you turn the pages of this book and turn to your Father in prayer, he will show you. God is our help. He turns the fatherless into sons and daughters. So put your hope in Jesus. Believe in the help and pursuit of the Holy Spirit. Trust in the goodness of the Father.

It's true, we don't choose our faith family. Our God does that. And he will. As he welcomed you, so he will empower you to welcome others.

