



Becoming a

Bethany House

By simply opening the door to your home, you can become a sanctuary for others.

by Kellie LaFollette

We stepped off to the side on the olive-green carpet while others were bustling about clearing dishes. She held me close in a lingering embrace, whispering six simple words, “You have a Bethany House here.” Deep in my soul, I experienced a holy, encouraging mantle cross between us.

Speaker and author Jill Briscoe was visiting Oregon as our church’s keynote speaker on Mother’s Day weekend. As a part of the events I hosted a luncheon in my home for Jill and the women church leaders.

Jill’s itinerary was tight. Before I had a moment to ask any clarifying questions, they whisked her away to the next commitment on her busy schedule. I wanted to run after her and ask, “What does that mean?”

Her schedule and my injuries kept me rooted to the olive-green carpet as she slipped out the front door.

The Search for Bethany

Eager to gain an understanding of what it meant to have a Bethany House, I spent several months researching every biblical reference to Bethany and the concept of a Bethany House.

Bethany was a tiny, but significant village two miles south-east of Jerusalem. Hidden in the shadows of the Mount of Olives, its secluded location offered residents rest within groves of palm and fig trees. In the mountain stillness, a few dozen families cared for the sick and for “untouchable” people, those cast out of their families and society.

In the journey to understand Bethany better, I was surprised to discover some of the most well-known stories of Jesus’ ministry all happened in Bethany:

- Jesus stayed with His friends Mary, Martha, and Lazarus in Bethany when traveling (Matt. 21; Luke 10).
- Jesus wept in Bethany (John 11:35).
- Jesus raised His friend, Lazarus, from the dead in Bethany (John 11).
- Jesus received His “burial anointing” from Mary at the home of Simon the leper in Bethany (John 12; Matt. 26; Mark 14).
- Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday from Bethany (Mark 11; Luke 19).
- After His resurrection, Jesus offered His disciples their final blessing in Bethany (Luke 24).
- Jesus will return one day to Bethany (Zech. 14; Acts 1).

Knowing Jesus’ heart for the “least of these,” it isn’t surprising that Bethany became His home away from home. There, Jesus experienced love, rest, and refreshment without the press of the crowds. No wonder this tiny town is where He raised the dead, shared hope, offered peace, and bestowed blessings (John 11, 12; Mark 14; Matt. 26).

Life in and around Bethany is our example of radical hospitality, illustrating what it means to love your neighbor, even the unlovable ones.

My Bethany House

For over 20 years, I taught elementary school. I loved teaching and my students. When the doctors made the call that ended my teaching career, I went home to a mountain of unknowns. Just as leprosy confined many to Bethany, radiation burns to my eyes confine most of my life within the walls of my home.

I had one simple prayer, “Lord, can I keep this house and somehow use it for Your kingdom?”

As my ability to participate in life outside my home decreased, my desire to welcome people into my home increased. Desperate to stay connected to my church family, I offered to host a Bible study from home.

Are you familiar with the swirly mix of emotions of being both nervous and excited at the same time? My stomach turned flips from nerves; my heart was full of hopeful anticipation. To prepare, I studied the Scriptures, vacuumed the house, set up the heavy wooden chairs, placed a welcome sign on the front door, and made tea.

Everything was prepared and ready. I kept checking the clock eager to welcome the first guest. In all the preparation, it never occurred to me there might be another plan. The set time came and went. The door never opened.

No one showed up. Not one person.

Week after week I repeated the preparations. Week after week no one came. I began wondering if I would be alone the rest of my days.

In the pain of shrinking hope, a friend offered a different perspective. Her tone was gentle and wise. “Don’t you see, Kellie? Jesus just wants time alone with you before you minister to others.”

Her encouragement reframed my shattered heart. She helped me see this time as a sacred gift I hadn’t recognized.

Life in and around *Bethany* is our example of *radical hospitality*, illustrating what it means to *love your neighbor*.

Months later when the next session of Bible study opened, I offered to host a Bible study in my home again. I admit my “yes” was shaky. This time, though, the door opened, and women came in.

Over 10 years later, they are still coming. God, in His kindness, has provided even further opportunities to open my home. Now, Bible studies, community groups, special prayer times, and even a luncheon for Jill Briscoe happen. Perhaps most important, my home is a welcoming place for neighbors who don’t yet know Jesus.

The most honored guest, invited into each gathering, is the Holy Spirit. We ask for His presence and guidance. He is always welcome here.


With 24-hour eye pain and extreme light sensitivity, welcoming people into my home takes special care. Though I live in rainy Oregon, I still need specialized blinds on the windows to filter out the brightness. Newcomers, unfamiliar with my story, politely hold questions as they adjust to less physical light. Yet as we venture into prayer, conversation, and God’s Word, the true light of the world eclipses the lack of physical light.

Your circumstances are likely different from mine, but still full of your own real and unique obstacles. Invite Jesus into your space. Allow Him to work out the challenges that seem insurmountable. Remember, Bethany was not a perfect place. It was hidden from view and full of outcasts. Each of our lives can feel like that, too. When you open the door to your heart and invite God in, significant kingdom work can happen wherever you are just like it did in Bethany.

Your Bethany House

Jill Briscoe reminds us, “Your mission field is right where you are, between your own two feet.” Bethany is a concept that extends far beyond her whispered words, “You have a Bethany House here.” Bethany of the Bible was a small community where the outcasts lived as God’s beloved.

Our “Bethany” is wherever our feet are, both inside and outside of our homes. My feet are most often planted on the olive-green carpet of my home, but Bethany is more a matter of the heart than of a particular location.

Do you carry a sense of Bethany wherever your two feet are? That space doesn’t have to be a house. The Holy Spirit is in you and moves with you. Together you can share the heart of Bethany with family, friends, visitors, and the marginalized—wherever you are. A Bethany heart seeks to serve and care for others in the name and love of Jesus. 

Kellie LaFollette spends her days sharing God’s Word, praying, and encouraging others. She lives in Mt. Hood in the beautiful Pacific Northwest. You can contact her at: kellielafollette.com.



Ministry on the Go

Stop and pray with a friend in need.