

A Culture of Invitation

The clock – it's not about you

When I was a student I was the proud proprietor of a “Disco”, yes there really were such things called discos. This was a mobile disco but nothing to do with Landrovers. We specialised in Soul and Funk, with a bit or Reggae for a garnish. In those days it was mainly the boys who asked the girls for a dance. I, in fear of rejection like every other boy, decided to turn the tables, so to speak, by offering an “emancipation” song. In other words, I would announce beforehand that a song was going to be played during which the girls could ask the boys to dance. Now girls, you can see what it feels like to get rejected!

There are many types of invitation:

- Inviting someone to dance, on a date, to get married – fraught with fear of rejection
- Invitation into business with you – fear of rejection plus risk of financial failure
- Invitation - to join in - to a street party, wedding, funeral, event, club, sport, fun
- Invitation to meet someone – famous friend, celebrity speaker, new arrival – baby, school head, business leader

The bible is one long invitation, to a kingdom party, to revolution, into battle, an invitation to come home.

Isaiah 55:1-4

Come, all you who are thirsty,

come to the waters;

and you who have no money,

come, buy and eat!

Come, buy wine and milk

without money and without cost.

Why spend money on what is not bread,

and your labour on what does not satisfy?

Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good,

and you will delight in the richest of fare.

Give ear and come to me;

listen, that you may live.

I will make an everlasting covenant with you,
my faithful love promised to David.

The gospel is an invitation. The whole bible is both God's party invitation and his enlistment papers.

We are his people on earth, we've accepted his invitation and we're now extending the hand of invitation on his behalf.

But some invitation scenarios are difficult

- because of fear of rejection? Because linked to you – reject me, reject my life and reject what I like.
- a lot rides on them – business deals for example.
- easier when it's no skin off your nose if they don't come.
- easier when you are excited about the result or know that it will be meaningful.
- but we may be reluctant – when we know there will be a cost

Immigration - God is always saying "come", come to me, come to my people

Acts 2:39 - the invitation is to all who are far off

Inaugurated eschatology – the Lord comes to dwell among us (John 1:14) – we are to be his people, so when he issues an invitation to others through us we are inviting them to come to us, because he is with us.

Not an invitation to "come – but stay where you are" – if our invitation isn't practical as well as spiritual it is no invitation.

Not a political point but a theological one.

Britain has been built on a Judo-Christian heritage of invitation.

How did you end up in the church family? Almost certainly someone invited you.
Parents, friends?

John 1:45-46 – Philip invites Nathaniel "we have found the one" (see the previous talk in this series).

John 4:28-30 – The Samaritan woman invites her neighbours “to meet a man who read my mail, could He be the one?”

Why do you make an invitation? Because you have found Jesus. You have found grace and mercy. You have received forgiveness and been redeemed. You are being changed and finding freedom and purpose to become truly human.

You have found a cause worth living for and King worth dying for.

You are getting to know your creator and have been filled with His Holy Spirit. You are learning to hear His voice and know his love. You can see His work in the world. You have come alive to the awareness that you can make a difference in the world!

You know that a fulfilled/purposeful/healed/whole life is only possible when walked with Jesus (that’s why those of us who are parents are desperate for our children to learn the way of Christ, the habits of holiness as much as possible, as early as possible, so that, God willing, they may hear his voice and find their way into his presence and the Lord into their heart).

To what are making the invitation?

To a relationship with Jesus – spiritually.

But a spiritual journey can’t be walked alone. Part of our job as a community of faith is provide a place where people can grow in their relationship with Jesus.

Practically, the family, the church – is a number of things:

1. a service for the gathered community, a public event, open to all and radical in its diversity in age, stage, education, ethnicity, financial state, health
2. clusters of small groups of people who meet in each other’s homes during the week to do life together and learn about becoming disciples of Jesus
3. people forming together to do acts of service in our community – as a team, representing the love and mercy of God
4. a place where families raise their children in community with others
5. a place/space of sanctuary, safety, prayer, healing, worship, learning
6. An organic community of people (the body of Christ) with Jesus at the head/centre – redeeming, healing, nurturing, inspiring – to be change-makers

When you think of “church” – a combination of these ideas will make up the experience and event that is “church”.

The invitation is to all of this.

40% of people have never been involved in church in any meaningful way. You know much more than they imagine.

The main entry point is usually weekly worship – but could be through other activities like Alpha or CCC, or Belly Buttons or simply through relationships.

One of the purposes of this (weekly worship) is to support you in explaining the good news about Jesus.

By all accounts we are already a welcoming church.

But do we have a posture of invitation to those around us? If they come we make them welcome but how often do we invite people to come?

Invitation precedes welcome.

We'll think about obstacles to invitation in the coming weeks – think about fear and whether what we do can be changed to make invitation easier.

What is success?

Success is about making the invitation not whether or not someone comes.

James Anderson

England's all-time highest international wicket-taker when combined across all three formats, being the country's leading wicket taker in Test match and One-Day cricket. A right-arm pace bowler, Anderson made his international debut at the age of just 20. He features regularly in England's Test squad and is a regular strike bowler in England's One-Day team. He is the first English bowler to reach a 400 wicket-haul in International Test Cricket, and is currently the 8th highest Test wicket-taker of all time.

Slide 1 - Total balls bowled – 87,397

Slide 2 - Wickets - 1841

Slide 3 - Strike rate – 47.47

Slide 4 – “Failed” with – 85,556 balls

Success follows lots of “failures”. Not failures really, they are builders toward the result.

It's about a work of God – we're just joining in

The journey you are making in following Jesus is an act of grace by God on you. The Holy Spirit of God has been on your case for a long time, decades, since before you were born. Building.

What is happening in the lives of the people around you?

God is building His work in their lives.

The Holy Spirit of God is at work as He reveals God's love to them – too.

Psalm 139:15,16

My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

He is at work in the people around you too.

Building - speaking, calling, nudging, challenging, inviting.

We get to play a part in this.

We may bowl the ball that gets the wicket – or we may bowl one of the other 47!

This is His work. The offer and the results are in His hands.

We get to play a part by asking a question, making an invitation.

Clock

5 minutes past	hardly aware of God, can't imagine an alternative future, NO
20/25 minutes past	this is not the first invitation, something has been happening in their life. That sounds nice. Maybe I'll come along some day. But they don't.
20/25 minutes to	they sense there's more to life than this, interested, we'll be there on Sunday. But don't come. Or maybe just once.
5 minutes to	Been waiting for an opportunity to check God out. Maybe this is the time. Yes. And they come.

Lots of stages in between. God is at work but you may not know whether you are nudging someone from 5-past to 10-past (although their answer is "No") and that the next person who invites them will be picking them up at 10-past.

Or maybe you are picking someone up at 10-to and nudging them toward 5-to.

Whether it is ball 1 or 10 or 20 or 30 or 47.47.

The people you pray for.

Wonder where they are on the clock?

Wonder what the Holy Spirit is doing in their lives?

Stop and pray for them and for the opportunity to give them an invitation – to take your part in what the Holy Spirit is doing in their lives to woo and draw them toward Jesus.

Conclusion

Like the woman at the well, like Philip with Nathaniel, we have found the person who can rescue and change every life. The person who makes it possible to be forgiven and to be filled with power to live a purposeful, gracious, meaningful, world-changing life.

That doesn't make you an evangelist or a preacher or necessarily particularly good at sharing your story with others. You don't have to get everyone you speak to from 5-to to the hour.

You can simply join in the work of the Holy Spirit by making an invitation, "Would you like to come?" "I would love you to come!" and making it easy for people to say yes and making it possible for them to come if they want to.

The Holy Spirit is doing the work in people's lives, why don't we make ourselves available to Him to speak the words of invitation?

We are welcoming church, now let's become an inviting church.

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