

## Invitation

Last week was Dinner Parties week! I love that time in our church! Denise and I were invited to dinner this last week! It was so good. It made us feel appreciated, loved and included in their lives. It was an honour for us to be invited to their house. They cooked. Had a desert. They had a brilliant bottle of wine. We responded to the invitation as a mark of our respect to them and to honour their hospitality. It was an honour to be invited.

Invitation! Denise and I have had a full house since we got married. We love inviting people to dinner, for lunch, to restaurants. We've done breakfasts, ordered take-away and had pizza delivered so many times! It's an opportunity to just get to know people better and a great way to spend an evening.

If you've been invited you've been honoured! Someone want to hang out with you. Someone thinks enough of you to request your company for an evening. It means they like you, they want to hang out with you a bit and get to know you better. It all begins with an invitation.

If you're the inviter you have a special opportunity to make your mark. Show your love. Bless someone. Whether it's a great dinner, a brilliant wine, a winning restaurant or inviting others into a deeper understanding of who you are. It's a journey of discovery! It all begins with invitation.

The Bible has a lot to say about hospitality and invitation. My favourite passage is found in **Romans 16: 23** where Paul is writing about a person named Gaius. He writes, "Gaius, whose hospitality I and the whole church here enjoy, sends you his greetings." Gaius seems a bit like the life of the party.

There's a story about Jesus in the book of John where He had an interesting experience in a very inhospitable place. In **John 4** we read an interesting account of Jesus and His followers on their way back to the province of Galilee. The way they travelled took them through Samaritan territory. It was the quickest route to their destination though not always the most comfortable route.

### Map – jpg for the screen

A bit of background history. Jews and Samaritans did not like each other. Jews regarded Samaritans as dogs, as half-cast Jews not pure breed; they were racists. They regarded Samaritans as having an incomplete understanding of God and religious worship. These Samaritans were looked down on by the Jews. They were liars, dishonest and dirty.

The Samaritans didn't like the Jews either and saw them as proud arrogant people very proud of their religion and religious practices. They felt prejudiced against them. Many times the disagreements between them became violent and aggressive. They distained each other to the point of hatred and personal disgust. Just an aside if any one remembers the parable Jesus told about a "good Samaritan" you'll understand how horrible the story was being received by the audience.

**John 4: 5 – 7** records that on this particular day at noon Jesus and His crew arrived at "the Samaritan village of Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son, Joseph, long ago. Wearing by his long journey, he sat on the edge of Jacob's well. He sent his disciples into the village to buy food, for it was already afternoon."

While sitting there resting a Samaritan women came to draw water from the well. In a cultural exchange that defied social norms Jesus, breaking every cultural rule, engaged this woman in conversation. I need you to understand how powerful this seemingly innocuous conversation transpired. In the UK in 2018 we miss the power of this encounter.

1. She was a woman – Jewish men would never initiate conversation with a single woman in public.
2. Jesus was a Jew and she a Samaritan – A Jew would never speak to a Samaritan if he didn't absolutely need to.
3. Jesus was a rabbi and they would never engage a woman in conversation publicly
4. It was noon – only a woman ostracised from her community would come to the well at noon. Rumours were she was an immoral woman a fact Jesus quickly verified. She had had 5 husbands and the man she lived with was not her husband.

The pair engaged in conversation. He identified her immorality and she deflected with a theological question which Jesus answered. They talked more and Jesus began to explain the nature of who He was. She realised quickly that He was the Messiah. She may have been a Samaritan but she knew the Old Testament spoke of a Messiah! The Christ! Let's take a deep dive into this passage of scripture.

After her incredible encounter with Jesus she went back down to her township and said these words. **John 4:29**, "Come, see a man who told me all the things that I have done; this is not the Christ, is it?" The invitation! She had little standing in her town but was excited to invite the whole town to come and hear this man.

**John 4:30** says "Hearing this, the people came streaming out of the village to go see Jesus." Something attracted their interest and curiosity.

**John 4: 35** says, "As the crowds emerged from the village, Jesus said to his disciples, "Why would you say, 'The harvest is another four months away'?"

Jesus was saying why are you making excuses? Look I spoke to one woman and she's invited the whole village! "Look at all the people coming—now is harvest time!" Jesus was saying his followers make excuses and doubt the power of His attraction.

Jesus was saying look at all these people – they understand spiritual truth – they are more spiritual than you give them credit for. I know there are some really tough people in your world – but they are more receptive than you may realise. Stop making excuses for the lack of a harvest of souls. People are ready to receive spiritual truth. You need to make the invitation!

This is what the Holy Spirit whispered into my heart recently. The Holy Spirit is stirring us to speak about Jesus and He is also stirring a generation around us to listen. People in this generation are searching for spiritual truth, searching for answers that work. People are looking for God and behold God is actually looking for them as well.

Never underestimate your casual conversation and chance meeting with people. You never know what kind of spiritual seeds you are planting. We cannot afford to make excuses about a lack of response from people. The problem is not the harvest the problem lies with the reapers.

Jesus said, [**John 4: 35 – 36**] "For their hearts are like vast fields of *ripened grain*—ready for a spiritual harvest. And everyone who reaps these souls for eternal life will receive a reward." The Devil has us thoroughly fooled into thinking people are not interested in spiritual truth. He makes us feel embarrassed to share our faith. At one point in your life you saw the need for Jesus – they will as well as you involve yourself in their lives.

The world around us is like a vast field of ripened grain! People's hearts are ready to be harvested. People are ready to hear the good news about Jesus. Jesus said "**Now is harvest time!**" We who harvest will receive a reward! Amazing. Profound. I want this reward. I want to see people coming into relationship with Jesus!

Jesus continues, [John 4:36] “And those who plant spiritual seeds and those who reap the harvest will celebrate together with great joy! And this confirms the saying, ‘One sows the seed and another reaps the harvest.’” Someone sows another harvests. This is such a beautiful rhythm established by Jesus. We are all doing our part, whether it is sowing or reaping. We are all involved in the Harvest and will receive our eternal rewards for it.

Jesus finishes just as the crowd arrives by saying this; [John 4:38] “I have sent you out to harvest a field that you haven’t planted, where many others have laboured long and hard before you. And now you are privileged to profit from their labours and reap the harvest.” The end of this story is powerful and the stuff for history books! It is so inspiring for us to hear the results of such a small invitation to come and see!

Listen to this; [John 4: 39 – 42] “So there were many from the Samaritan village who became believers in Jesus because of the woman’s testimony: “He told me everything I ever did!” Then they begged Jesus to stay with them, so he stayed there for two days, resulting in many more coming to faith in him because of his teachings. Then the Samaritans said to the woman, “We no longer believe just because of what you told us, but now we’ve heard him ourselves and are convinced that he really is the true Saviour of the world!”

Making an invitation to others is a powerful response to being in relationship with Jesus. This woman had a spiritual encounter, it was her story of an encounter with Jesus! When we meet Him we want to tell others. We really can’t help tell others, we’re full of His Spirit and have had a “beautiful exchange.” Jesus encouraged us to do so!

Jesus Himself speaks and invites us into relationship with Him. **Revelation 3:20**, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with me.”

Jesus issues His invitation to us – he longs to meet with us and to have fellowship with us. It is His heart’s desire to meet with us – so strong is this desire He actually issues an invitation. He stands and knocks – anyone who responds and opens the door He will come in and dine with us!

Invitation is central to salvation. Invitation is central to the message of salvation and essential to a healthy local church. Invitation is central to a relationship with God. Invitation is central to Christian discipleship. We must be faithful to invite people to follow Jesus. Response is a personal requirement to receive from God.

**Romans 10:10 – 13**, “For it is **with your heart that you believe** and are justified, and it is **with your mouth that you profess your faith** and are saved. As Scripture says, “Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame. For, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

#### **Points to consider about invitation:**

1. **People will not respond without an invitation.** In today’s world people rarely just drop into other people’s houses! Not too many people will suggest they have dinner at your house either! You organise your diaries and make a booking some time weeks ahead! So it is with a personal invitation to people to come and see.

Many people think we are a private club or secret society. People need to understand what we’re inviting them too. We need time to explain. We need a growing relationship with levels

of trust and believability for them to enter into a conversation. It takes time. We may plant a seed and not see it grow for months or years. But we know the seed is good.

We provide beautiful full colour and well formatted invitation cards to make it easy for you to give to someone. These cards are not made as reminders of a particular event but a useful tool to put into people's hands. They don't just come in cold. You're the link. A warm friendly face, a beautiful venue and great refreshments, clean bathrooms, recently hoovered carpets, modern designs, great kid's programmes and contemporary music with relevant messages.

2. **Invitations are given when you think what you have will benefit others.** Dinner parties are designed for this purpose. Dinner with each other helps you to get to know someone better. You develop a deeper understanding and respect for each other.

You only get out of a relationship what you're willing to put into a relationship. If you don't love your church you're probably not going to invite people to be part of it. If you're not in good relationship with Jesus you're probably not in good relationship with your local church. If you're not in good stead with your local church you won't be inspired to tell others about your experiences with Jesus.

3. **Invitation is an act of hospitality and generosity to those we know.** It is an act of love, a showing of our respect and our kindness – invitation paves the road to deeper relationship, invitation is part of inclusion – allowing people to feel part of the party. This invitation has no hidden agendas. Invitation shows you're thinking of them. It shows they are important enough to solicit an invitation from you. You value them to the point of "Come to my house!" That could be your home or your home.
4. **Jesus is inviting people and we are His voice, His hands and feet.** Out of relationship we invite people to receive Jesus. They see something they want in you – they see your peace, your confidence and your ability to weather the storms of life. We're they're bible – we're the Jesus they can see and touch. They realise you have something they don't and we invite them to receive it too!

**2 Kings 7:9** is a scripture Phil has been speaking on the last few weeks and it is relevant to us today! ***“What we're doing is not right. This is a day of good news and we are keeping it to ourselves.”*** You've been wonderfully saved and made right with God. You have God in your life and it has made all the difference to you. Jesus is real in your life, your marriage, your family, at work and with your everyday life – don't keep it to yourself! This is a day of Good News!

**Matthew 11:28-30** (TPT), "Are you weary, carrying a heavy burden? Then come to me. I will refresh your life, for I am your oasis. Simply join your life with mine. Learn my ways and you'll discover that I'm gentle, humble, and easy to please. You will find refreshment and rest in me. For all that I require of you will be pleasant and easy to bear."

Jesus invites you "Come to me!"