**The Invitation – Week 1 – Identify**

**Message Big Idea**: Inviting starts with identifying people we know who might be ready to receive Jesus’ invitation.

**Scripture:** John 4:1-19, 25-42

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**Introduction: “Why Am I Here?”**

Tell me if you can relate. It’s the end of the workday. As you gather your things and climb into your car, you remember that you need to stop at Target on the way home. You creep along in traffic and then notice your gaslight is on. So you pull in to the nearest station and fill up before making your way to the store. Emerging from your car in the parking lot, you instantly hear someone calling your name. It’s your friend from church – a nice, unexpected bright spot in your day. You chat for a few minutes there in the lot ­– she is leaving as you are arriving – and then you make your way into Target. You grab a cart and start down the main aisle before your pace slows and you come to a dead stop.

There, in the middle of the store it hits you… **“Why am I here?”** For the life of you, you can’t remember what you are there to buy!

How many of you have experienced this?

How many of you experience this quite often?

Yeah, maybe we need to start a support group! I can forget what I came for in the distance it takes me to walk from the couch to the refrigerator. I can’t count the number of times I’ve climbed the stairs from my lower level to my upper level only to stand there in confused bewilderment. “Why am I here?”

I want to start with that question today because as we gather as a church community this morning, I want to make sure every one of us knows with crystal clarity why we are here.

We are here *(add)* **To** **Help People Find Their Way Back to God**.

Everything we do around here is about that mission.

* We gather here to celebrate God together to help people find their way back to God!
* We connect in Small Groups to support one another as we help people find their way back to God!
* We contribute both in and outside of the church to help people find their way back to God!

Everything we do around here is about that mission because we believe Jesus extends an invitation to every person...an invitation to a life-changing relationship. He wants to walk through life with us. He wants to make our lives better and make us better at life. He wants to give us hope and a future.

We are here to find our way back to God.

And we are here to help others find their way back to God too.

**Series Intro**

*(Series Graphic)* And that’s why we’re starting a new 3-week series today called **“The Invitation.”** We want to be a community of people who extend the invitation to others to find their way back to God too. This series is leading up to a very special day on Sunday, September 16…a day we call *(graphic)* **“Show Up Sunday.”**

“Show Up Sunday” is an annual initiative aimed at helping people find their way back to God. On this special Sunday, we challenge everyone who calls COMMUNITY their church home to not only “show up,” but to invite 5 friends, neighbors, co-workers, or family members to join them.

Understand, we don’t invite people to fill up auditoriums. We invite people because Jesus has extended an invitation. We invite people because Jesus makes our lives better and makes us better at life. People need to experience Jesus, not just hear about him. When we invite them to join us for a Celebration Service, we are inviting them to experience Jesus maybe in a way they’ve never experienced him before. We are inviting them to find their way back to God.

Over the next three weeks we’re going to learn how we can extend “The Invitation” to others by exploring how Jesus extended it to us. Jesus invited people in general, he wants everyone to find their way back to God, but in some stories in the Gospels he made specific invitations to specific people. We’re going to look at one of those stories today.

**Word: John 4**

*(John 4:3-6)* As we come to this story in John chapter 4, Jesus is traveling with his disciples. They’re on the way from Jerusalem in Judea back to Galilee, where they lived. And on this journey, they’re passing through the region known as Samaria.

As they approach a village in Samaria, Jesus sends his disciples into town to buy some food, while he stays back by himself and takes a seat by a well. It seems Jesus wants some alone time. It was noon, the hottest time of the day out in the middle of terrain that was dry and dusty. Yet Jesus is like, “Hey, you guys go ahead into town…I’m just going to sit here baking in the hot sun.” If you’ve ever been on a road trip with the people you’re closest too, you get that, right?

*(When a Samaritan woman came to draw water…” –John 4:7a)* Well, as Jesus sits there alone, along comes this Samaritan woman who also must have wanted to be alone. Normally the women would come together in groups to draw water, and they’d never come at the hottest time of the day! This woman was hoping to avoid contact with people, but there at the well she comes face to face with Jesus, and this is what happens:

**“Jesus said to her, ‘Will you give me a drink?’… The Samaritan woman said to him, ‘You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?’ (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)” –John 4:7b,9**

The woman’s surprise is understandable. We have to realize, Jesus, a Jewish man, had every reason to overlook this Samaritan woman. The hatred between Jews and Samaritans was real.

* Like Bears versus Packers real.
* Like Superman versus Lex Luther real.
* Like Katy Perry versus Taylor Swift real.

In fact, the parenthetical comment there at the end of verse 9, *(highlight)* **“For Jews do not associate with Samaritans,”** is actually literally translated, **“For Jews do not use vessels in common with Samaritans.”[[1]](#endnote-1)** The enmity between the two groups was so strong that they avoided all contact. One scholar notes:[[2]](#endnote-2)

**“Samaritans were thought to convey uncleanness by what they lay, sat, or rode on, ~~as well as by their saliva or urine.~~ Samaritan women, like Gentiles, were considered to be in a continual state of ritual uncleanness.” –Andreas J. Kostenberger**

Jesus had every reason to overlook this woman and yet…what does he do? *(“Jesus said to her, ‘Will you give me a drink?’” –John 4:7b)* He asks her for a drink. He asks to drink from the same vessel she drinks from.

And then he uses a beautiful water metaphor to reach this woman’s heart.

**“Jesus answered her, ‘If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.’ ‘Sir,’ the woman said, ‘you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water?’ … Jesus answered, ‘Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.’ The woman said to him, ‘Sir, give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.’” –John 4:10-12, 13-15**

We all know what it is like to be thirsty…not just literally, but metaphorically. We do anything we can think of to try to satisfy our thirst. We go to the well over and over again.

Let me ask you…what are you looking to for satisfaction? What well do you keep going back to?

* Is it career success?
* Is it entertainment or pleasure?
* Is it the accumulation of belongings?

In a moment we’ll learn that this woman at the well was looking to romantic relationships to satisfy her thirst. Yet, Jesus says, if you keep drinking from this same well, you’ll just get thirsty again.

And then he extends an invitation. He says, *“Come and try me. Experience me. A relationship with me is like living water. Once you find me, you will never thirst again.”* He extends the invitation.

And then I love what happens next. Then…

**“He told her, ‘Go, call your husband and come back.’ ‘I have no husband,’ she replied. Jesus said to her, ‘You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true.’” –John 4:16-18**

You see, there is a reason this woman was coming alone to the well at high noon. Match how we talk about her to the conclusion. ~~She had a scandalous reputation~~. She may have been the talk of the town. Yet in these words, Jesus shows that he knew all about her before extending the invitation. He knew her checkered past. He knew her shame. Yet, he doesn’t write her off. He knew all about her, and none of that affected his desire to extend to her the invitation.

It makes me wonder… Who do we “write off” because of what we know about them? Maybe we think…

* “There’s no way they’d be interested the invitation.” Or…
* “They seem to be doing fine without the invitation.” Or…
* “They’re too far gone for the invitation.”

But Jesus never writes anyone off. Instead, there was something Jesus was looking for, and when he saw it in this woman…he read the cues…he knew this was the moment to extend the invitation.

**Cues to Invite**

It is amazing that Jesus did this and there is so much we can learn form Him in this…

You see there is something Jesus was paying attention to…there was something he was listening for and whatever it was it prompted him to think, “This is my moment…I am going to invite this person. I am going to extend an invitation to this person.”

And invitations can change everything! If you think about it, most of our lives have affected by an invitation that we did get or we didn’t get.

Invitations are powerful!

There is a great book that I read a few years back that talks about this idea…It’s a book called (Show cover) “The Power of Habit” ~~by Charles Duhigg~~.

In this book he talks about how our lives are all essentially made up of the habits that we do every day. But then he digs in a little deeper and he asks, “Why do we do the things we do?” and “Why do we have the habits we have?”

And he says that it is because of the cues that we are paying attention to…And when the cue happens it prompts us to have this habit in our lives.

And he says, if you want to change the habits you have to change the cues. Or at least pay attention to different cues.

When it comes to our God-given mission to help people find their way back to God…One of the most important habits, one of the most foundational habits, is inviting.

When we invite, something happens. Not just to the person we invite but something happens to you and me when we invite.

Make a statement about what happens in us when we invite…(Ted will send a sentence).

But in order for us to invite well, we have to pay attention to the cues…the right cues.

So today, I am going to layout 4 Cues.

And I want to encourage you to do whatever you need to do to try and remember these…Maybe you want to write them down or take a picture of the screen as we walk through these but whatever you do; be intentional about paying attention to the cues to invitation happening around you.

So our first Cue, Something is changing.

This is the person who is facing a new life circumstance and they may not feel prepared.

 Really anytime someone is entering uncharted territory in their life…

Empty nesters, getting married, kids becoming teenagers, new to a community, recently divorced, a new job or a promotion or new parents…I mean let’s be honest, no new parent heading home from the hospital is actually prepared or qualified to do what they are doing!! ☺ I’ll never forget that feeling of pulling out of the hospital parking lot thinking to myself…”I this really legal?” ☺

When we see or hear something changing in someone’s life it ought to be a cue for us to invite!

I don’t know about you but the Church has really helped me through the major transitions of my life.

So I hope we can have confidence saying to a new parent, “You should really come and check out our church! I know it will help you and it will help your kid…It helped me a ton and you should come mix this up to give a different example of what to say sit with me this Sunday”

Our second Cue, Something is breaking.

This is when something in the person’s life is not going well. You know what I am talking about…We’ve all been there.

This is when we see someone wrestling with one of life’s many curveballs: their health, marriage, business, work, finances, kids, anxiety or depression.

We never wish for someone to go through a season of ‘breaking’ and it should be a cue for us to help support and encourage them…And an invitation is a way for us to do just that!

We can see it as a cue to say something like (pastoral tone) “You should come and sit with me at church this Sunday…I’ve never been through exactly what you’re going through but I know what it’s like to be struggling and my church really helped.”

Third, Something is missing.

This one might be a little more obvious…end with this one Is the person not in church? Or maybe the person seems dissatisfied with their life. They are not connected with others. Or maybe they are not fulfilled in their job.

But whatever it is, something seems to be missing and it is an opportunity to share about he hope we have in Jesus…It is a cue for invitation.

And Finally, Something is stirring.

Sometimes the cue for extending an invitation has nothing to do with what you can see in another person’s life BUT it has everything to do with something stirring inside of you!

Sometimes, The Holy Spirit prompts us to extend an invitation to the person who looks like they have it all together, your neighbor, a friend, a total stranger or the last person you would ever expect to come to church.

At times we might see the Cue or feel the stirring to invite someone but we are hesitant to invite because we assume people will not be receptive.

But did you know that either don’t say who lifeway is or explain it Lifeway recently did a study that found…

 51% of unchurched people said a personal invitation from a friend or neighbor

from the church would be effective in getting them to visit.

 55% of unchurched people said a personal invitation from a family member from

the church would be effective in getting them to visit.

Did you catch that?! Over 50% of people would say yes if they were only invited!

Wow! What an opportunity! So, let’s pay attention to the cues and simply invite…It doesn’t have to be awkward or worded perfectly…It just needs to happen and then we get the privilege of seeing God do something amazing in the life of someone we care about.

Which is exactly what happened with Traci…

**Video Story**: Possibly Traci Wappes sharing about inviting her neighbor Karen who found her way back to God at DG

**Challenge: Identify 5**

Each of you got one of these cards (show card) with 5 blanks for names…Go ahead and pull it out now.

Over the next couple of weeks we all are going to have some amazing opportunities to do this…In just a few weeks (September 16th) we will be doing our annual “Show Up Sunday.” Show Up Sunday is a week where we go ALL-OUT to create an amazing experience for guests to come check us out and join in on what God is doing here.

And you can play a part in changing someone’s life if you’ll just listen to the cues…

So, this week I want to give you the opportunity to pray and ask God to help you identify 5 people who you could extend the invitation to…Maybe when we were going through the 4 cues you had some names already come to mind…write them down!

And then who knows…Maybe you and I will get to join in the incredible joy of seeing someone meet Jesus and see for themselves that He is not only the Savior of the world but He is the savior of ***their*** world.

**Conclusion: John 4**

Need to have Scripture or talk about her response. Remember how the woman from our story today had a life-changing encounter with Jesus. And then, in her excitement, she runs back to her village to tell others: “Come and see!”

WE can be like that woman.

That woman who had started to believe the lie that she was worthless…That woman who had been told by 5 men that “I am done with you!” Her, of all people, finds the grace of Jesus and it changed her life so much so that she told everyone around her.

And the people around her were like “ hmmm…Maybe…But I need to see for myself.” But they accepted her invitation and had an encounter with Jesus. And they realized, “Oh my goodness! He IS the Savior of the world” and then they invited others and that happened again and again until the whole town had found their way back to God!

And here we are 2000 years later…Jesus had every reason to overlook me, he knew about all the twisted things in my life...and yet he came after me and extended the invitation. And he’s extended it to you…

State more explicitly…we were invited, will we now invite others…

The question is: Will we, like the woman, invite others to “come and see!”? Will we extend the invitation?

**Communion**

* Write a 200 word (or less) reflection to lead into Communion.
1. Gerard S. Sloyan, *John, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), 53. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Andreas J. Kostenberger, *John*, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 149. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)