**The Invitation – Week 2 – Invest**

**Introduction: Friends**

For most of us, when we were teenagers or college students, our friends were our entire world, right? Our closest friends were everything to us. It’s probably safe to say that we invested more time and energy into our friendships than we did with anything or anyone else. Our friends were our highest priority. Highlight the imbalance “Friends are life!”

This was certainly true for me. I remember back to my high school days in the mid 90’s, there was a group of about 6 of us friends. And I remember being in that place of wanting to be around my friends every single moment of every day. It didn’t matter what was happening, we just made sure that we were always together. We were together at church and student group gatherings; we were together at games and school events. I think I can speak for the entire group when I say that we felt most alive when we were together.

I remember one summer afternoon, we were all looking for another reason to get together, and so a few of us got on a three-way-call… do you remember doing that from a landline? And on that fancy three-way call we concluded that the funniest thing we could all do together was to go and toilet paper another friends house… in the middle of the day, while they were still at home! I didn't say that we were smart; we just really liked each other!

So we did it… and shockingly… or maybe not so shockingly… we got caught! But the great thing about us friends was that spending quality time together didn’t require an intelligent activity, it just required *being* together.

Most of us here probably have similar stories with our friends from high school or college. Now, I’m confident that you and your friends were probably a lot smarter than we were, but you just loved being together, right?

**Friend: Brain Study**

It turns out we’re actually hard-wired for this. Well there was a study recently published that was conducted by the University of Oxford in England. It discovered that there are societal trends that show us that the older we get the less social we become.

It’s actually believed that we, as humans, are at our social peak by the age of 25. And after that, there’s not just a decline in our social connections… but a rapid descent. And that decline continues on for the rest of our lives. So basically, that tells us that the older we get the less time we invest in our friends and connecting with others becomes more and more infrequent.

However, just because there’s a downward turn in our connections with others doesn’t mean that our need for connection declines. In fact, I would suggest that our need for personal connection **increases** the older we get.

Better transition. Tell the story of the study (shock on ankle). In a brain research study conducted by social neuroscientist Jim Coan, it shows that our brains can sense when we’re being threatened or are under heavy amounts of stress. So our brain releases hormones that help us balance that stress.

But in his study, Coan wondered how the presence of a friend would alter the brains response. And what he found was that when the person who was experiencing stress was simply holding the hand of a friend… the stress levels were significantly lower than with those who weren’t with or touching a friend.

How do we include singles in this? Our culture…instead of “we” Here’s why this is significant: we spend a lot of time focusing on having the perfect marriage and raising the perfect children (which are both really good things), but research tells us that our brains are significantly impacted in positive ways from having strong friendships. There’s great personal value when we invest in solid friendships.

One researcher actually said that, *“Friendship is an undervalued resource. The consistent message of these studies is that friends make your life better.”*

I certainly can’t speak for everyone here, but my experience tells me that statement is incredibly accurate.

Now don’t get me wrong… I want to be the best spouse I can be. And I want to raise the best children that I can. We all want that and not an inclusive statement God wants that for us… so I’m not saying that’s bad or that’s not important.

Instead, what *I am* saying is that just focusing on those things, our marriage and our kids, while neglecting the personal connections we have with others… isn’t a healthy way to live… it isn’t what God wants for us. He designed us with an innate need to invest in relationships with friends. Maybe talk about how we see this in Jesus…

**Series Recap**

We’re in week two of our series called, **“The Invitation.”** And this series is all about being prepared for a special day… two weeks from now… that we call *“Show Up Sunday.”* In preparation for this day, we’re challenging one another to invite 5 of our friends, neighbors, colleagues or family members to join us right here on Sunday, September 16.

Now, we don't just invite people so we can fill up this auditorium. Instead, we invite people because we know that Jesus makes our lives better and makes us better at life. We know that people need to experience Jesus… not just hear about him. And when we invite them to a celebration service, we’re inviting them to an opportunity to experience Jesus. We invite people to help them find their way back to God.

Now, maybe you’re sitting here thinking, *“Wait a second… I’m here because someone just invited me!”* And if you’re here for the first time today… I just want to say, **“Welcome!”**

I’m so thankful that you’re here today and I think you picked a great week to come because you’ll be able to get a better understanding of why we exist as a church and what we believe God’s called us to do.

Here at COMMUNITY, we’re serious about following Jesus, and we can clearly see in scripture over and over again that Jesus invested in relationships. When we read through the Gospels, we find that his life was filled with stories of meaningful relational encounters.

In fact, today we’re going to take a look at an incredible chapter in the Gospel of Matthew to see how Jesus spent his days. It’s important for us to do this because ~~Jesus accomplished more for the kingdom of God in just this one day of his life than I have throughout my entire life!~~

So let’s check out this “Day in the life of Jesus” and see what we can learn!

**Word: Matthew 9**

Before we get into the actual text, I want to help set the context for what we’re about to read. Do we? ~~We talk a lot around here about how important it is to understand the audience that the author was writing to and the goal that they were trying to accomplish.~~

Why did we do this? Is this supposed to come back later? Either shorten this or come back later to explain that all that Jesus was doing was proof he was the Messiah.

For this particular Gospel, Matthew was writing to a primarily Jewish audience. Some of the people he was writing to saw themselves as followers of Jesus, but also still religiously Jewish at the same time. So Matthew works really hard to prove to his audience that Jesus is the Messiah.

To the Jewish people, the Messiah was their long awaited Savior and King… he was the one they thought was going to come in, overthrow their Roman oppressors, and bring a reign of peace and prosperity to the Jewish people. You see the Messiah was the one they’d been waiting for… for a really, really long time.

Now we’re going to start ~~reading~~ in chapter 9 and I want to focus in on a series of 3 stories that illustrate how Jesus invested in relationships with those around him. Just prior to this, Jesus had been traveling all around the region healing people, casting out demons, and calming storms. Then finally, after this whirlwind trip… Jesus returned home. *(onscreen Matthew 9:1-8)*

Make sure this doesn’t come across as Jesus never rested. I don’t know what you do after a long business trip, but I can tell you what I do when I get home… I lie down on the couch and put my feet up, right? After I’ve been traveling and I finally get home all I want to do is relax. But do you know what Jesus did? He just kept right on investing in people ~~working~~!

In the first story, as soon as Jesus stepped off the boat he was immediately asked to heal a “paralyzed man, lying on a mat.” Instead of asking for a moment to relax, or pushing this guy off for one of his followers to help… Jesus stopped everything he was doing and invested in this man.

But he did it in a really weird… maybe even unexpected way. Jesus said to the man **“Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven”** (Matthew 9:2b). Now my guess is that most of us are a little confused about what this guys sins have to do with his healing. I mean, he didn’t ask for forgiveness, he asked to be healed… to be able to walk again, right?

Well here’s what we need to understand: Jesus is trying to make a point here. Right at the very beginning of this chapter we see Jesus make this crazy declaration that this guys *“sins are forgiven.”*

To us, that doesn’t make any sense… it’s not even relevant to a case of paralysis… but in Jesus’ culture, diseases were thought to be caused by sin. In fact, almost every physical malady: blindness, paralysis, mental health issues… most experts saw them as either the result of the sin of the person afflicted, or their parents!

Notice, Jesus doesn’t argue for this understanding of illnesses, here or anywhere else, but to that paralyzed man laying on the mat in the hot sun… the assurance of forgiveness had to have been breathtaking.

He’d likely spent his entire life feeling guilt and shame for some sin that he or his parents had committed and he carried the weight of that “sin” for his entire life. And in this one moment, Jesus brought healing… not physical healing, at least not at first… but emotional healing.

What this shows us is that: **Jesus invests by listens to understand people’s hearts.**

In this culture, where disease was traced back to sin… Jesus wasn’t just interested in the man’s physical well being… he cared about his heart. Jesus eventually healed the man, but just as importantly, Jesus also spoke words of forgiveness to heal and remove his guilt and shame.

After that emotional scene, Jesus continued on and came across a *(onscreen Matthew 9:9-13)* “tax collector” sitting at his booth… just doing his job. Now I’m not always a huge fan of the IRS, but I doubt that any of us would say we hate the IRS agents, right? Even if we’ve had a bad experience with that particular governmental entity, we can usually separate our frustration with the organization from a particular person.

But that wasn’t the case in Jesus day. Tax collectors were the lowest of the low. They were one of the most despised and hated members of Jewish society. And it’s almost understandable why. Not only did they work for the Roman government (which was brutally oppressive to the Jewish people), but they also cheated and stole from their Jewish neighbors. They would literally over charge people for their taxes, just to make an extra buck! And Rome didn’t care as long as they got their portion of the taxes.

Well Jesus comes across this hated tax collector and seems extreme instead say “instead of throwing shade” instead of spitting at him as he walks by… Jesus decides to invest in him. In fact, Jesus asks him if he wants to have dinner! That’s incredible. In fact, it’s hard to overstate the significance of eating together in Jesus day. Even today, sharing a meal with someone is a big deal, right? It’s usually seen as a more intimate connection… it means that you’re not just acquaintances… you’re actually real friends.

Sharing a meal in Jesus day was like that… times 1,000! Eating together was a very public sign of friendship, acceptance, affirmation and value. Meals, even inside a persons home, were usually shared in a very visible place where people outside the house could see who was at the table.

And that’s why the religious leaders were so shocked and outraged that Jesus would associate himself with this tax collector… this unclean sinner. Matthew tells us that as they ate together **“many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples”** (Matthew 9:10b).

You see Jesus ate with people others avoided. He invested in people that others despised. What this demonstrates for us is that: By eating with Matthew and his friends, **Jesus invests by affirms their value**. He made the intentional decision to invest in people who were different than him… people that others despised… because they matter to God.

Now I want to jump forward a little and focus on what I think is an exceptional example of the way Jesus chose to invest in people around him. Starting in verse 18, *(onscreen Matthew 9:18-19, 23-26)* Jesus is approached by someone Matthew refers to as simply *“a synagogue leader.”* This could mean a lot of things, but it’s completely possible that this guy was one of Jesus’ enemies… someone that hated Jesus and what he stood for. ~~This guy could very well have been one of the people that would eventually call for Jesus’ crucifixion.~~

But in this moment, none of that mattered to the *“synagogue leader”* because he was desperate. *(Highlight)* **“My daughter has just died. But come and put your hand on her, and she will live”** (Matthew 9:18b) he told Jesus. Amazingly, Jesus went with him without hesitation and healed his daughter.

This shows us that: **Jesus invests in others by meeting specific needs.** I mean think about it, he was responsive to this mans request, he took action when there was something he could do to help, he was even willing to be interrupted… in fact, even this story he gets interrupted by a woman who was bleeding.

Jesus provides us with a ton of examples of how he invested in relationships… in the lives of people around him. Just over the course of this one-day Jesus:

* Healed the paralyzed man
* Ate with tax collectors and sinners
* Brings a dead girl back to life
* Heals the woman who was bleeding
* Restores sight to the blind
* And speech to the mute!

Jesus makes our lives better…and better at live. Jesus does this for us.

Jesus walked through his day investing in people... he was completely **“people-centric”!** And Jesus didn’t schedule his calendar around all of these people, he didn’t try to carve out some time in his busy schedule… instead everywhere he went, he was attentive to opportunities to invest in others. Sometimes he pulled away from the crowds. Every time an opportunity presented itself, Jesus responded by investing in relationships. Jesus accomplished all of these things as he was just going through his day.

**Challenge: Intentional Investing**

Now as I read through this chapter I’m challenged forced to ask myself an important question that I’d like you to ask yourself: **How am I following Jesus by investing in people as I go through my days?**

Remember those 5 people we talked about earlier… the ones we’re challenging all of us to be praying for and inviting to Show Up Sunday? How are you doing at investing in them? Are you looking for ways to intentionally invest in those relationships?

I’ve got to admit; sometimes… I'm not very good at this. Jesus gives us such a great example to follow and sometimes I fail to invest in those around me. So maybe, like me, you’re sitting there trying to figure out where to even start.

Well let me give you a few ideas. Maybe one of them will spark your imagination and help you begin to follow Jesus’ example of investing.

* When one of your 5 comes to mind... **send them a text or call** and just ask*, “How are you?”* But then really listen to what they say, see if there’s a way you can invest in their lives… even if it’s just praying for a specific need they have. Jesus listened… we can too!
* Or how about this: when you’re planning for dinner… maybe you’re planning to cook out tomorrow for Labor Day... consider extending a last-minute invitation for more people to join you around the table. **Share a meal with them**. Jesus ate with people… we can too!
* Or maybe, when one of your 5 mentions a need they have, make the intentional decision to **serve them**… do something to help meet their need. It can even be something simple, like mowing the lawn or giving them a ride to an appointment. Jesus served… we can too!

**Conclusion**

What if we lived as a community of people who walked through our days intentionally investing in the lives of others? What if, instead of just letting people pass us by, we actually took the time to invest into them? The first four books of the New Testament, called the Gospels, were written so that people would come to know Jesus.

So how are the people in our lives coming to know Jesus? Will they come to know him because we rush past them on to our next appointment? Will they come to know him by the constant start of hurry we live in? I don’t think so.

How will they come to know Jesus? Well I think Jesus himself gives us the answer in the Gospel of John. He says, **“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another”** (John 13:35).

We love by intentionally investing in the lives of those around us.

Give opportunity at beginning to write down names. So who are your 5? I want to ask you to look at the 5 names on your card right now. You know these people probably better than anyone. How can you be intentional about investing in their lives this week?

The world around us is shouting at us… trying to convince us that our best move, our smartest investment is to invest in ourselves.

And you know what… we can do that… we can ignore people and invest only in ourselves. Or we can choose to follow Jesus’ example. We can look beyond ourselves and invest in the lives of others to help them find their way back to God. Let me tell you… there’s nothing more valuable than that!

Remember, we invite people to a relationship with Jesus because we know that Jesus makes our lives better and makes us better at life.

**Communion**

(On screen: Matthew 9:9-13) This is one of my favorite pictures of Jesus. He was intentionally choosing to be around society’s “less than”. But to him, they weren’t less than anybody, they were people. And to Jesus, people were worth spending time with and investing in.

And here at this communion table people could probably call all of us “less than” also. But not Jesus, he calls you and me friends. And he invites us to be around this table, not because we have it all together, but because we don’t have it all together.

As we take communion together now, let’s reflect on the idea that Jesus wants us here. He invites us here. He wants us at this table so much that he gave up his life so that we could be here.