**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?

Maybe we need to start a support group! I can forget what I came for in the distance it takes me to walk from my 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, 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 to help people find their way back to God!
* We connect in Small Groups to 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 a life-changing relationship to every person. He wants to walk through life with us. He wants to make our lives better and make us better at life.

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 3-week series called **“The Invitation.”** We want to be a community of people who extend the invitation to others to find their way back to God. 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 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, but in some stories in the Gospels he makes specific invitations to specific people. And 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 pass 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 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 long 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.

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

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 when she questions him, 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…where 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 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 is coming alone to the well at high noon. I believe she believed a lie that she was worthless. After all, she’s been told by 5 men, “I am done with you!” 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 past. He knew her shame. Yet, he doesn’t write her off. He knows all about her, and none of it affects his desire to extend to her an 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.” Or…
* “They seem to be doing fine without Jesus.” Or…
* “They’re too far gone for me to extend 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 an invitation.

**Cues to Invite**

There is so much we can learn from Jesus! You see there is something Jesus was paying attention to… something he was listening for…and whatever it was it prompted him to think, *“This is my moment! I am going to extend an invitation to this person.”* Jesus was attuned to certain cues.



There is a great book that explores this idea. *(Cover)* It’s called, “The Power of Habit.” In this book the author 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 asks: “Why do we do the things we do?” and “Why do we have the habits we have?”

He says it’s because of the cues we are paying attention to. When the cue happens, it prompts us to carry out a certain habit. He argues that if you want to change the habits in your life, you have to change the cues…or at least pay attention to different cues.

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

Invitations can change everything! If you think about it, most of our lives have been affected by an invitation that we did or we didn’t receive. When we invite, the life of a person we know can be dramatically changed. And our lives can be dramatically changed, too, as we experience what it is like to help someone find their way back to God!

But in order for us to learn to develop this habit of inviting, we have to learn to pay attention to cues…to the right cues. These cues are certain moments in a person’s life that signal they might be open to an invitation. *(Heading:* 4 Cues) Let’s talk about four of them today, and I want to encourage you to do whatever you need to do to try and remember these…maybe write them down or take a picture of the screen. Together, let’s be intentional about paying attention to these cues. *(Build cues under the heading)*

The first cue is: **Something is changing.**

These are the people who are facing new life circumstances, and they may not feel prepared for those circumstance. They are entering into uncharted territory.

They could be empty nesters or getting married or have kids becoming teenagers. They might be new to a community or recently divorced or starting a new job. Maybe they are new parents, and let’s face it…no new parent heading home from the hospital is actually prepared to do what they are doing! ☺ I’ll never forget that feeling of pulling out of the hospital parking lot thinking to myself, ”Is this really legal?”

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

I don’t know about you, but being connected to a church community has really helped me through the major transitions of my life. So let’s have confidence saying to a new parent, “Being part of COMMUNITY has really helped me as I’m raising my kids, and I bet it would be great for you too! Why don’t you join me next Sunday?”

A second cue to invite is **Something is breaking.**

This is when something in a person’s life is not going well. We’ve all been there. We’ve all wrestled with one of life’s many curveballs: health issues, marriage conflict, problems with work, finances, kids, anxiety, or depression.

We never want anyone to go through a season of ‘breaking,’ but it happens, and it should be a cue for us to offer support and encouragement. And an invitation is one way for us to do that! When we see someone going through a hard time we can say, “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.”

A third cue is **Something is missing.**

Maybe a co-worker is expressing dissatisfaction with their life. Or a neighbor mentions that they wish they had more family friends. Or a family member isn’t feeling fulfilled in their job. Or, and this one might seem obvious, the person simply doesn’t have a church home.

Whatever it might be, something seems to be missing, and that can be our cue to extend an invitation. We might say, “I have found so much joy and encouragement being a part of my church, would you be interested in visiting to see if it is place you’d like too?”

Finally, the last cue… **Something is stirring.**

Sometimes the cue for extending an invitation has nothing to do with what you 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 a person, even if they look like they have it all together or if they are the last person you would ever expect to come to church.

Maybe you’ve felt this stirring before, but have been hesitant to invite because it’s easy to assume people won’t be receptive. But did you know that a recent survey study found that:[[2]](#endnote-2)

* 51% of unchurched people said a personal invitation from a friend or neighbor would be effective in getting them to visit. And…
* 55% of unchurched people said a personal invitation from a family member would be effective in getting them to visit.

Did you catch that?! Over 50% of people would say “yes” if they were invited! What an opportunity! So, let’s pay attention to the cues and invite! It doesn’t have to be awkward or worded perfectly. An invitation just needs to be sincere. And when it happens, we just might get the privilege of seeing God do something amazing in another person’s life.

Which is exactly what happened with Traci…

**Video Story: Traci Wappes**

**Challenge: Identify 5**

*(Picture of Invite Card or packet)* When you came in today, each one of you received one of these packets, I’d like for you to take this out now.

Over the next couple of weeks, we all are going to have some amazing opportunities to invite. As I mentioned, on 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 challenge us to pray and ask God to help us identify 5 people we could extend the invitation to. In this packet, you’ll find a card where you can write down their names, and five business cards with information about our church that you could hand them.

Maybe as we were going through the 4 cues, you had some names already come to mind. Take that as a prompt form the Holy Spirit and write them down!

And then who knows… Maybe you and I will get to join in the incredible joy of seeing the people we know find their way back to God.

**Conclusion: John 4**

When Jesus encountered the woman at the well, he had every reason to overlook her, yet instead, he saw the cues and extended an invitation.

(John 4:28-30) In her excitement, the woman ran back to the village and invited everyone to “Come and see!” for themselves.

Here’s the truth… You and I are that woman. For Jesus had every reason to overlook us. He knew about every twisted, sinful thing in our lives; yet he came after us and extended the invitation. Aren’t you glad he did? I can’t imagine my life without him.

But, now it’s our turn. It’s time for us to run to those in our neighborhoods, homes, workplaces, and schools; and invite them to “Come and see!” for themselves.

We are here to help people find their way back to God. So let’s look for the cues. Let’s extend the invitation. And celebrate as Jesus transforms more and more lives.

**Communion Idea**

*Coming in the BEST manuscript*

1. Gerard S. Sloyan, *John, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), 53. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Source: Lifeway. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)