

INVITE SOMEONE

Years ago there was a woman from the States named Vie. She went to church one day and heard a guest speaker talk about how important it is to share your faith with others. She decided that she would do what she had been told. She went across the street to her neighbours and tried to share her faith with them, but it was a bad experience. She did not know what to say and felt very awkward. So, she decided to take another approach. There was a teenage boy who lived next door called Dan. She decided to pray for Dan every day. One day she got up enough courage to invite him to go to church. He did, and gave his heart to Jesus. His name is Dan Spader, the founder of Sonlife Ministries. I had a chance to visit Israel with Dan years ago and heard him share this testimony. How the prayers of his neighbour and a simply invitation had changed his life.

We are continuing with our series this morning called Invite. Two weeks ago I talked about the GIFT plan, does everyone remember what the word GIFT stands for? It means that we all need to GREET people we have never met, INTRODUCE people to each other, FOLLOW UP with someone you met recently and THANK someone who did something you appreciate. Last week Steve talked about Andrew and the power of invitation.

He mentioned that, according to different surveys, at least 25% of people say that they would be VERY likely to attend church if a friend would just take the time or make the effort to invite them! Think about that... that's 1 in 4 of your friends is very likely willing to come to church if you invited them to go with you. What an opportunity! The sad truth, though, is that only 2% of church members invite an unchurched person each year. Do we not realize how powerful a simple invitation can be?

Acts 10:24 The following day he arrived in Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends...⁴⁴ While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. ⁴⁵ The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. ⁴⁶ For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God. Then Peter said, ⁴⁷ Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have. ⁴⁸ So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days.

Today I want to talk about 9 simple little words that can change a person's life. Those 9 little words are; Would You Like To Come To Church With Me? These 9 little words are powerful. Again, this is not about getting into a theological or intellectual debate about the existence of God or the value of organized religion. All that's required is that you ask one little question: "Would you like to come to church with me?"

What is it that keeps most people from attending church?

First, you may not want to invite someone to church because they are from a different religious background. Here in Brampton there are lots of Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims. Many of these people have come to Canada within their lifetime. Asking someone to come to church with you is just your way of inviting them to see something perhaps they have not experienced before, and most are very open to doing that.

When I lived in Kuwait, a strictly Muslim country, it was very easy to talk about my faith. In fact, you could not speak with a Muslim for long without the issue of faith coming up. They were curious.

They had heard all kinds of terrible things about Christians, and they were interested in how much of it was actually true. Instead of debating religions with them I would tell them exactly what Jesus said to Andrew, come and see. Come and see for yourself what a church service is like. Most were very open to it. Don't assume that just because a person comes from a different faith that they would not be open to coming to church with you.

Secondly, you might think that people are not interested because Sunday is their day off and they are too busy to go to church. Have you ever heard anyone say that? The fact that they recognize the need for rest is a good thing. A few months ago I spoke about the need we have a day of rest.

However, rest is more than just not working. We need to remind people that just like their physical bodies need rest, their spiritual batteries also require recharging. Going to church is kind of like going to the gym. Most people know it's good for them, that they ought to do it, but they're just lacking the motivation to fit it into their schedule. Just like exercising regularly, the benefits of being a part of a healthy, well-balanced church far outweigh the sacrifices.

There are lots of different medical surveys that show that going to church is physically good for you. It lowers your blood pressure. It helps with depression. It gives you a better immune system and cardiovascular system. People who attend church weekly live longer, go to the hospital less often and have a strong sense of satisfaction and well being into old age.

A third thing you may expect people to say is that they do not want to go to church because it is boring. Perhaps they grew up going to church but stopped because they feel it is irrelevant to their life. Our multi-media culture has conditioned us to require vast amounts of stimuli to maintain our attention. A lot of churches and Christians respond to this complaint by saying, "Well, church isn't supposed to be entertaining!"

Really, are you sure about that? When I read the New Testament I see that Jesus sure was entertaining! The Bible tells us that...

Matthew 7:28 When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching

Matthew 22:33 When the crowds heard this, they were astonished at his teaching.

Mark 11:18 The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching.

Mark 12:37 David himself calls him 'Lord.' How then can he be his son?" The large crowd listened to him with delight.

Jesus was able to captivate and hold the attention of crowds for hours at a time. If you don't think church should be entertaining, at least we can agree that it should be interesting and enjoyable. Now, I don't claim to be as dynamic or spellbinding as Jesus, but I sure hope I can capture your attention for 25 or 30 minutes. When our worship or preaching is dull, people don't just think the pastor or the worship team is boring, they think Jesus is boring. He's not!

Going to church each week should be a joy! If you want your friends to give church a try then you need to show some enthusiasm and excitement about church. Let the people you see on Monday know what a great time you had on Sunday.

Lastly, you may not want to invite someone to church because you are afraid that other church members will not be friendly to them and they will not feel like they fit in. I think the most overlooked key to growing a church is loving outsiders the way Jesus did! One of the first thing people notice about a church is the acceptance and friendliness (or lack thereof) of the members.

Last week I mentioned that Welcoming people is important. We are called to love people because Jesus loves people, and we are called to be like Him. The Bible says that we show our love for God by the way that we love other people.

1 John 4:7-8 Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. 8 Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.

If you love God and you love your church, then make a concerted effort this week to invite your friends, relatives, associates, and neighbors to church with you. Just 9 simple little words, Would you like to come to church with me? Let me give some advice when inviting. Before we send you out there are a few tips you should take with you.

1. BE PRAYERFUL

Before you invite someone to church it is important that you pray about it. Pray for the person you are thinking of inviting and pray that God would touch and soften their heart to your invitation.

When I was a youth pastor we were preparing for a large youth event. A well known speaker was coming and our youth group was going to be joining with other youth groups from around the city to gather in this arena for this event. I had all the youth break up into prayer triplets, very week for 3 months the youth would gather into groups of three and each pray for three of their friends they wanted to invite. The outcome was amazing.

2. BE SPECIFIC

when you say to someone ‘would you like to come to church with me’ don’t; say sometime. That is way too general and too vague. When you are not specific, it’s easy for people to be agreeable but just keep putting it off. SOMEDAY never rolls around; SUNDAY, however, comes along every week. So when you invite people to church, invite them on a specific day.

Over Christmas I received a note that one of our city councillors, a Sikh man, and his family were interested in attending a church service. I did not just say “sure, just come whenever you want.” I outlined what was happening for the next 4 weeks. I gave a bit of a explanation of how the services were set up and gave him options. They decided to come for the family service and loved it. Before you invite someone to church it is not a bad idea to first find out what is happening at church that week. Inviting someone to a missions week when we are talking about reaching Muslims may not be the best week to invite your Muslim neighbor. We plan our services months in advance and the upcoming service series is always on our website. So when you invite someone try to be specific. Say to them something like I would like to invite you to come to church with me, how does January 22 sound?

If you are ever interested in knowing upcoming sermon series you can always speak with me at the door before or after the services, or contact the church office during the week.

You may remember that I mentioned that we hope to relaunch Alpha this fall. They have a new curriculum and a new advertising campaign. Alpha is another very specific thing you can invite people to.

Whatever you do, be prayerful. Be specific.

3. BE CONSIDERATE

People don't like showing up somewhere new, feeling out of place, not knowing where they are supposed to go or what they're supposed to do. So when you invite someone, offer to pick them up, or stop by their house on the way so they can follow you, or at the very least meet them in the parking lot. That way they see a familiar face when they arrive, they aren't walking in all alone, you can show them where to go, and you can introduce them to people as your friend or family. It gives people a sense of security to know that you are by their side in this strange place.

4. BE PERSISTENT

You may have to extend a dozen invitations before someone says yes. That's okay. If you pick out 4 of your unchurched friends, relatives, associates or neighbors, statistically at least one of them will accept your invitation. You may have to work on the other 3 for a while, but it will be worth it in the end.

Remember the parable of the seed, the four soils, and the sower?

Matthew 13:3-9 Then he told them many things in parables, saying: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. 4 As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. 5 Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. 6 But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. 7 Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. 8 Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop--a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. 9 He who has ears, let him hear."

Of the four types of soil that the farmer scattered his seed across, only one in four (25%) actually produced results. But still he scattered the seed everywhere he went. Why? Because the more seed he scattered, the better his chances were of getting a crop. Look at every invitation you extend as one seed. The more seed you spread, the more results you'll see!

Just 9 simple little words, would you like to come to church with me? They can make such a difference in a person's life.

If, on average, only 2% of church members invite an unchurched person to church this year, let's be above average! Let's not be a statistic. One invitation, one question, can make all the difference for time and for eternity: "Will you come to church with me this Sunday?"

George W. Truett, a well-known Texas preacher, was invited to dinner in the home of a very wealthy man who made his money in the oil industry. After the meal, the host led him to a place where they could get a good view of the surrounding area. Looking to the East he pointed out his oil wells in the distance and boasted, "Twenty-five years ago I had nothing. Now, as far as you can see, it's all mine." Looking to the West he pointed to wheat fields and said, "That's all mine as well." Turning to the North were huge herds of cattle and he bragged, "They're all mine." Then pointing to the South there

was a forest, he exclaimed, "That too is all mine." He paused, expecting Dr. Truett to compliment him on his great success. Truett, however, placing one hand on the man's shoulder and pointing heavenward with the other, simply said, "How much do you have in that direction?"

Who do you invite to church? You start by inviting people that you know.

Invite your FAMILY. In verse 24 We see here that Cornelius invited his relatives to come hear Peter speak. Cornelius starts by sharing his own testimony of the vision he had been given. Peter then gave a simple gospel message. He talks about what he saw Jesus do, the power and the miracles. That Jesus dies but was raised to life. He proclaims that Jesus is God and that He will judge the living and the dead. He declares there is freedom and forgiveness through His name.

The result was immediate. The people believed and were filled with the Spirit.

Invite Your FRIENDS. It says in Acts that Cornelius did not just invite his relatives but also his close friends. For more than fifty years the Billy Graham Evangelical Association has been 'helping believers share their faith through friendships.' More than eighty percent who come to Christ at the Billy Graham crusades attended because a friend who knows Christ brought them. Back in the 1980s they had a plan called Operation Andrew, and it is based on the scripture Pastor Steve spoke on last week. Next week we will have the

Acts 10:24 The following day he arrived in Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives *and close friends*

Invite Your NEIGHBOURS. Next to close friends and relatives, often the people we may know the most are our neighbours.

Luke 15:8-9 Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? 9 And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.'

In this parable, the woman finds something of great value and calls her friends and neighbours together to celebrate with them. Of course, Jesus was telling this parable to talk about the joy of finding salvation. Who better to share that joy with than your neighbours?

An elderly woman was eager to serve Christ. She wanted to go door to door and invite people to come to her church but she could not walk well enough. After praying about the matter, she decided that although she might not be capable of walking from house to house to invite others to church, she was still able to play the piano. The next day she placed this small ad in the Oakland Tribune which read: "Pianist will play hymns by phone daily for those who are sick and despondent. The service is free." The notice included the telephone number to dial. When people called, she would immediately inquire, "What hymn would you like to hear?" Within a few months she had played for several hundred depressed and lonely individuals. Many of them freely poured out their hearts to her, and she was able to help and encourage them and then invite them to come to church with her. Later she testified, "That service became the most rewarding thing I ever did in my life."