

The Best Invitation

1: Why Invite? The Great Omission

Continuing our Big PICtire theme, this series is about Inviting.

THIS WEEK: Please all do the Welcome & What Next exercises

WELCOME

Put 2 large sheets of paper in the middle of the room.

On your own, each do the following:

1. Think of a friend or neighbour who lives nearby (Person 1)
2. Now think of something good that's happened to you recently – maybe some good news or something you've enjoyed doing.
3. How would you feel about telling Person 1 about that?

Write the first 3 words that come to mind on the first sheet of paper.

4. Now: Imagine Person 1 asks you 'What do you think about Jesus?'
How would you feel about answering them?

Write the first 3 words that come to mind on the second sheet.

Now all together:

Discuss the words on the 2 sheets of paper – what you've written & what others have written. You might like to think about...

- What differences are there between the 2 sheets?
- What do they say about you?

WORSHIP

Use music, silence, prayer, meditation, reflection, songs, hymns, etc. or be creative with drawing, writing, symbols, poetry etc to help people to draw near to God. You could try this...

Each think of something about Jesus that you are thankful for. Go round the room using one sentence prayers to thank him for these.

WORD

Read Matthew 28:16-20

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Discuss your initial reactions to the passage:

- Does anything in the passage jump out at you? Why?
- Does anything connect with something you've been doing, reading or thinking about?
- Is there anything you haven't noticed before?

Now use **some** of the questions below (*and set a time limit to leave yourselves time to pray!*)

Note: Disciples can be translated as 'followers of Jesus'

- How do you think the first disciples felt when Jesus said to them 'Go and make disciples of all nations'? Share as many different answers as you can.
- If Jesus came into the room now and said to you 'Go and make disciples of all nations', how would you feel?
- If you weren't a Christian, how would you react to the idea of someone wanting you to become a follower of Jesus? What would make you feel comfortable/less comfortable about it?
- To what extent do you think it's our job to 'make disciples' or God's job or someone else's?
- Jesus tells the disciples to teach others to obey everything he has commanded them. How good do you feel you are at obeying Jesus' command to make disciples in our town or nation?
- Jesus says: 'Teach them to obey everything I have commanded you.' What do you think are the most effective ways of communicating the things that Jesus taught today?

WHAT NEXT?

Everyone: Ready for the next meeting: Each think of 2-3 people who you know, who are not yet Christians, live less than 20 minutes away, and who you would like to follow Jesus.

Also You can write names on the bookmarks provided as a reminder

Now pray: Ask God to show you who to pray for in the next few days.

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2: Why Invite? Jesus did!

THIS WEEK: Please do the Welcome exercise, even if you often try different ways of starting your times together...

WELCOME & WORSHIP

Following on from last week's 'What Next?' exercise...

Make a 'PI Chart' (Prayer & Invitation Chart!)...

- On one big sheet of paper for the group (flip chart or bigger), each write down your own name joined to the first names of the 2-3 people you have thought of. Make sure you can all read the names!
- Go round the group & each briefly explain something about each person and how you know them.
- Split into 2s/3s and say short prayers for the people you've mentioned. Start by thanking God for them.

WORD

Read Luke 4:14-21

Discuss your initial reactions to the passage:

- Does anything in the passage jump out at you? Why?
- Does anything connect with something you've been doing, reading or thinking about?
- Is there anything you haven't noticed before?

Now use **some** of the questions below (*and set a time limit to leave yourselves time to pray!*)

- How do you think Jesus' time in the desert (vs 1-13) prepared him for the start of his ministry? How can we prepare ourselves better to serve God in our everyday lives?
- In the passage Jesus chooses to start his ministry (vs 18-19), he mentions both 'speaking' the good news and 'doing' it... What is important about each of these?

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- How many ways can you think of that we can, like Jesus, both 'speak' and 'be' good news to people?
- Have a vote: Do you find it easier to 'speak' good news or 'be' good news? Why?
- Think of someone you know who isn't a Christian. If Jesus met them, how do you think he would 'speak' and 'be' good news to them?
- How could you be more like Jesus in the way that you share the good news about him?
- Jesus (quoting Isaiah) has a special concern for the poor, prisoners, blind and oppressed (v18-19). Who are like this today – materially or spiritually? How can we be 'good news' to these people?

WHAT NEXT?

- Split into the same 2s/3s as earlier.
Discuss: How can you be a better friend to the people you put on the PI Chart?
Pray for one another that God would give you opportunities to share God's love in friendship & practical ways with these people over the next fortnight.
- Think about who you could invite to some of the church socials/events/services coming up in the next few months at Christ Church or Oakhanger

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3: Why Invite? Out of Love

THIS WEEK: Please do the Welcome exercise, even if you often try different ways of starting your times together...

WELCOME

On your own...

Each take a piece of paper.

Draw a circle in the middle of it (say 3" across) with a big dot in the middle. This dot represents God.

Now think of a mix of 4 or 5 people you know – maybe Christians/non-Christians, relatives, friends, work colleagues, neighbours etc.

For each one:

- Mark them on the paper as a dot – showing how far you feel they are from God at the moment.
- Now add an arrow to each one – showing which way you feel they are heading - nearer/further to God (or going round in circles etc!)
- Now (if you want) put yourself on the paper in the same way.
- For each of the people you've put on the page, think about how you could come closer alongside them where they are. How could you encourage them to move closer to God?

In 2s/3s: Each pick out a couple of things about your drawing and talk about what you've put and why. (*Remember: Someone far away, but heading towards their destination will get there sooner than someone nearer who is heading away*).

WORSHIP

Use music, silence, prayer, meditation, reflection, songs, hymns, etc. or be creative with drawing, writing, symbols, poetry etc to help people to draw near to God. You could try this...

Why not get a CD/DVD/Video clip of a familiar song about God's love, print out the words and sing along.

WORD

Read Luke 10:25-37

Discuss your initial reactions to the passage:

- Does anything in the passage jump out at you? Why?
- Does anything connect with something you've been doing, reading or thinking about?
- Is there anything you haven't noticed before?

Now use **some** of the questions below (*and set a time limit to leave yourselves time to pray!*)

- What do you find most difficult about loving God with all your heart, mind, soul & strength (v27)?
- Which do you find easier – to love God or your neighbour? Why?
- If you had to re-tell Jesus' story in a modern day setting, who would you make as each of the characters?
- In what ways are you like the Samaritan to the people around you? In what ways are you more like one of the other characters?
- Samaritans and Jews didn't get on. The Samaritan had good reason not to help.
 - * Who are the people you find it hardest to imagine helping you?
 - * Who are the people you find it hardest to imagine showing love to?
- Who has been like the Good Samaritan to you in your life?

WHAT NEXT?

- Get out your PI Chart. Take a few moments of quiet. Each think of the people who you wrote on the chart. How could you do a practical action of help for that person? What would Jesus do?
- Pray short prayers for one another and the people on the chart.
- Pray for the work of Tearfund and others who seek to show practical love to those in need.

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4: Why Invite? To welcome home

To prepare for this session, it would help to find the YouTube video below & have a means of playing it when you meet.

THIS WEEK: Please do the Welcome exercise, even if you often try different ways of starting your times together...

WELCOME

On your own...

Each take a piece of paper.

- Draw on it a picture or diagram showing your life story in relation to God. It doesn't need to be either comprehensive or a masterpiece! Just pick out a few highlights – maybe times when you have felt closest/furthest to God or when life has seemed to be going particularly well/badly.
- Add to it some people who had an impact on your faith (positive or negative) at different points.

In 3s/4s:

- Share your drawing and say a bit about it.
- If a non-believing friend said to you: 'Tell me about a time in your life when your faith made a difference?' How would you answer?

WORSHIP

Use music, silence, prayer, meditation, reflection, songs, hymns, etc. or be creative with drawing, writing, symbols, poetry etc to help people to draw near to God. You could try this...

Get a newspaper. Pass it round the group. Each person in turn: turn the page and say 'Thank you God for [something in a picture or story on that page]'. All say 'Amen.' Then pass on the paper.

WORD

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Read Luke 15:11-32

Discuss your initial reactions to the passage:

- Does anything in the passage jump out at you? Why?
- Does anything connect with something you've been doing, reading or thinking about?
- Is there anything you haven't noticed before?

If possible ... watch the Youtube video 'Home' by Ethos.

It's at... www.youtube.com/watch?v=mDNYb-flhcc

Now use **some** of the questions below (*and set a time limit to leave yourselves time to pray!*)

Think of each of the 3 characters (rooms) in turn. For each one...

- Describe how you think the other characters feel about this person?
- If you had met this person, how would you have felt? What would you have said to them?
- Have you ever known anyone like this person? Who?
- When have you felt or acted like this person?

Now, here's some more questions you may like to use...

- In what circumstances can you imagine a 'prodigal' son or daughter coming to our church? How would they feel?
- What can you do as individuals or as a group to help those who want to return to God?
- How can you be more like the father and less like the older son?

WHAT NEXT?

- Pray for yourselves as individuals; then as a group; then as a church... that we would be loving and welcoming to those who've turned their back on God, but want to return.
- Pray also for one another & those on your PI Chart.

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5: Who is Invited?

For this session, it would be good to have some food (nibbles/chips!) to pick at during your time together, to fit with the theme.

WELCOME

Spend time relaxing & sharing together. You could try this...

Play a game of 'Tea with the Queen' – a tea cup & saucer will help. Go round the room in turn.

- The first person says 'The Queen' & passes the cup on.
- The next person takes the cup and answers:
 - 'How would you feel if that person came to tea?'
 - 'What question would you ask them?'
 - Finish by saying the name of another famous living person.
- The next person answers the same questions & then gives another name. Continue round the circle until you've had enough!

WORSHIP

Use music, silence, prayer, meditation, reflection, songs, hymns, etc. or be creative with drawing, writing, symbols, poetry etc to help people to draw near to God. You could try this...

Pick a Psalm (eg Psalm 103). One person read the Psalm slowly out loud. Have a few moments of quiet, then a different person re-read the Psalm. As the Psalm is read, each decide: If you could one verse all day tomorrow, which would it be? Share your thoughts.

WORD

Read Luke 14:15-24

Discuss your initial reactions to the passage:

- Does anything in the passage jump out at you? Why?
- Does anything connect with something you've been doing, reading or thinking about?

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- Is there anything you haven't noticed before?

Now use **some** of the questions below (*and set a time limit to leave yourselves time to pray!*)

- For context, read Luke 14:1-4. How do you think the others at the meal would have reacted to Jesus' parable?
- In verse 15, the guest is referring to Isaiah 25:6-9 – which is echoed elsewhere by Jesus and in Revelation 21:1-4. In what ways is an invitation to the kingdom of God similar to an invitation to a wedding banquet? In what ways is it different?
- What do you think about the excuses the people make in verses 18-20? How many other excuses can you think of that people might make today? Which ones do you sympathise with?
- How do you think each of the following characters felt in the parable: those who were originally invited; the servant; those who came; the master?
- Where do you see yourself in the parable?
- What does it mean to invite someone to God's banquet in the kingdom of God? Who are we to invite?
- Do a) Christians b) Not-yet-Christians... today picture an invitation to God's kingdom like a wedding banquet? If not, why not? What pictures do people have?

WHAT NEXT?

- Discuss: What services/events would you find it easiest to invite a friend to at Christ Church/Oakhanger?
- Keep using your PI Chart to pray for the people on it – give updates on some of the people where appropriate.
- In 4s/5s: In turn, each briefly share one area of your life which is important to you (job, family, health etc). Someone else in the group say a short prayer for that person in that area of their life.

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6: How do we Invite?

THIS WEEK: Please do the Welcome exercise, even if you often try different ways of starting your times together...

WELCOME

On your own... Think of someone you know who is not yet a Christian. Imagine that person came to church for the first time last Sunday. Scribble your thoughts on a piece of paper (words/pictures)...

- How do you think they would feel?
- What would make it difficult or easy for them?
- How would you react? How would you feel?
- How could you make them feel more welcome?

Now imagine someone very different from yourself in some way (eg age, background). Repeat the exercise.

Now discuss your thoughts in 2s/3s, then share one thing from your discussion with the whole group.

WORSHIP

Use music, silence, prayer, meditation, reflection, songs, hymns, etc. or be creative with drawing, writing, symbols, poetry etc to help people to draw near to God. You could try this...

Take your PI Chart. Play a song with a theme of sharing the good news of Jesus with others. As you play it, silently pray for those on the chart.

WORD

Read John 1:35-51

Discuss your initial reactions to the passage:

- Does anything in the passage jump out at you? Why?
- Does anything connect with something you've been doing, reading or thinking about?
- Is there anything you haven't noticed before?

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Now use **some** of the questions below (*and set a time limit to leave yourselves time to pray!*)

- How do you think John felt when his disciples left him to follow Jesus (v35-37)? Give as many one word answers as you can.
 - * How would you feel if two of your friends decided to follow Jesus?
- Take a few moments to think, then discuss as a group or in 2s/3s: Imagine you were not a Christian and you decided tomorrow morning to start following Jesus...
 - * Who would you tell?
 - * Who wouldn't you tell?
 - * What difference would it make to your life?
 - * What wouldn't change?
- Imagine spending a day with Jesus at his house (v39). What do you think you would do? What would it be like?
- Jesus and Philip invite people to 'Come and see' (v39 & v46). In what ways could you invite people to 'come and see' Jesus?
- If a friend/neighbour of yours came to a service/event at church, in what ways might they meet with Jesus?
- Throughout this reading, when people meet Jesus they invite others to meet him. It seems natural & normal. What practical steps could you take so that inviting others becomes natural and normal for you?

WHAT NEXT?

- Christmas is a time when there are lots of visitors at church & lots of services/events (Carol Services, Schools, Old People's Homes, Coffee & Communion, Party, Nativity, Churches Together, Town Lights etc) How can you get involved? Pray for them – especially that people would meet with Jesus at them.
- Pray for one another – particularly anything you're worried about with Christmas approaching.
- Pray for Alpha starting in January & people on your PI Chart.

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Extra Stuff!

If you have sessions free at the end of this series, either:

- Find something of your own choice to do. There will be new notes starting in January.
- It is sometimes helpful to remind ourselves of things we've learnt in the past so that we continue to apply them to our lives. You could re-visit one or more sessions from the 'Cost of Christmas' series. They're on the Downloads section of the church website titled 'Autumn 2011 Part 2'.

This series of notes has to a small extent drawn on ideas from other courses: 'Breaking News' (J John), 'Beautiful Lives' (Roger Morgan) and 'Everybody Welcome' (Bob Jackson), all of which are recommended to anyone wanting to explore the subject further.

Toby May
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