

# Who's Your ONE?

*Building an Invitational Culture*

## Opening - Personal Vulnerability

Good morning, my Bridge family! I want to paint a picture of something we've all experienced in some way or another. You're at work one day, and you notice that one of your coworkers isn't acting like themselves; they seem to be upset about something, and you can see it in their face or in their behavior.

So, you approach them and ask that familiar question, "Hey buddy, or hey girlfriend! Are you alright?" And they say, "No, I'm not alright; I've been having some problems that I just can't seem to solve." At that moment, your coworker begins to unload everything that's been going on in their life—their marriage is failing, they're overwhelmed with debt, and bills are three months past due; their mother, father, sibling, or some other family member is very ill with cancer.

And all the while they are unloading all this information on you, the Holy Spirit is nudging you and whispering in your ear, "Now is the time. This is the right moment you've been praying for; the opportunity to invite someone to go to church with you. This is it! What are you waiting for? Go ahead and ask them!"

And what do we do? "Hey man, or hey girlfriend, I hear ya, and I'm sorry to hear that," as you pat them on the shoulder. "Let me know if there is something I can do to help bruh or sis." And you turn and walk away. Sounds really cold, doesn't it? But truth be told, some of us have done that or something like that at one point or another.

A few days, weeks, or months go by, and you ask that same coworker again, "How are things going?" They tell you they got divorced, had to file for bankruptcy, their mother died, or all the above, and they don't know what to do.

And this isn't to say that inviting them to church with you would have prevented any of those things from happening. But think about it. If you had asked them to go to church with you, that could have been the moment in their life when they heard the gospel message clearly for the first time, and God would have softened their heart, leading them to give their life to Christ. Even though all those things still might have happened, now that they have Christ in their life, they have new hope and a fresh perspective on life.

But instead of responding to the nudging of the Holy Spirit and seizing the opportunity to impact that person's eternity, we chose comfort over courage. When it comes to leading people to Jesus Christ, choosing comfort over courage can be harmful for both the individual and yourself. For the person involved, it's a matter of eternal life or eternal death; for you, it's a matter of guilt, shame, and, more importantly, accountability.

**That's why we're having this conversation today. Because some of us are living with that same guilt and shame, and some of us are about to.**

## The Brutal Truth

As believers in Jesus Christ, we all believe in heaven. We believe in hell. We believe Jesus is the only way to salvation. But we don't always live as if none of that is true.

We'll argue about politics and moral issues on social media for hours, but we won't take five minutes to talk about Jesus. We'll give recommendations for good places to eat, a TV show to watch on Netflix, or the best cell phone to buy, but we won't suggest the church that's changing our lives.

**And yet, people are dying—literally dying—while we remain comfortable and silent.**

When was the last time you invited someone to church? I mean, actually looked them in the eye and said, "Come with me Sunday"?

If you can't recall the last time, then this message is for you. If your answer is "never," then this message is especially for you.

## The Story That Changes Everything

Forty years ago, I met a young man named Sedrick while I was attending basic training at Fort Jackson, South Carolina. Sedrick, being from Sacramento, California, and I, being from Culver City, California, we were homeboys, and that's what drew us together.

Whenever we didn't have intense training over the weekends, which was rare, we were allowed to attend church services on Sunday. Being the good Christian I believed I was at the time, I would take advantage of that opportunity. Sedrick didn't know Jesus, which I learned through our occasional conversations. It was during those conversations that the Holy Spirit prompted me to invite Sedrick to come to church with me. One day, I gathered the courage to ask him, along with some of my other battle buddies, to join me.

Long story short, Sedrick heard the gospel of Jesus Christ for the first time during our eight tough weeks of basic training, and he committed his life to Christ. He and I are still good friends today, and he keeps growing in his relationship with Jesus.

**One invitation resulted in one person coming to faith in Jesus Christ, and potentially others.**

I was nervous about asking Sedrick and the others to come to church with me. I was afraid of what they might think of me, or that they would think I wasn't cool enough to hang out with them anymore because I went to church.

**What if I had allowed that nervousness to keep me from asking? What if I had chosen comfort over courage?**

Sedrick's eternity hung in the balance of one uncomfortable conversation.

## Text: Matthew 4:18-22

*Read passage*

If you're that person who, when I ask the question "When was the last time you invited someone to church," responds with never, for any reason or excuse, this passage dispels those reasons and excuses. Jesus didn't wait for perfect people to come to Him; He went to the imperfect people and personally invited them.

The religious system of that time had rejected these fishermen. They were the "unchurchly" people of their era. But Jesus saw beyond their rough appearance to their eternal potential.

**He went to them. He invited them. He changed their lives forever.**

## Why We Don't Invite (The Real Reasons)

Before we discuss how to invite others to church, let's honestly examine why we don't. This list isn't exhaustive, but it covers some of the most common reasons.

**"What if they think I'm weird?"**

Well, I have some bad news for you: they already think you're a little weird for believing in Jesus. Own it. Being weird is better than staying quiet when someone's eternity is at stake.

## **"What if they ask me questions I can't answer?"**

So what? Say, "I don't know, but I know someone who does. Come with me on Sunday and let's find out together." Your ignorance isn't an excuse for their confusion.

## **"What if they've been hurt by the church?"**

First of all, the "church" didn't hurt them; it was someone or some group of people who did. If that's the case, they need to see what true church looks like. They need to experience grace instead of judgment, love instead of condemnation. YOU might be the person God uses to heal their wounds.

## **"What if they say no?"**

Then they say no. So what? They're not rejecting you; they're rejecting God. You're no worse off than before you asked. But what if they say yes? What if that invitation changes their eternity?

## **"I don't want to be pushy."**

There's a difference between being pushy and being persistent, and being pushy means focusing more on your own agenda than on their true feelings. Persistence shows that you care so deeply about their eternity that you won't give up easily.

# **The Eternal Stakes**

When you get down to it, what's truly at stake here? There are people in our lives right now—a coworker, a neighbor, a family member—who will die without Jesus. Not might die. WILL die. And when they do, they will spend eternity separated from God in hell.

## **And we have the key to their freedom.**

We have the gospel. We belong to a church family that loves Jesus and loves people. We have the opportunity to introduce them to the man who could transform their lives forever. Do you realize that, with that knowledge, we will be held accountable for it?

I want you to see this for yourself; stay in Matthew, and turn with me to Ezekiel 3:18. "If I say to the wicked person, 'You will surely die,' but you do not warn him—you don't speak out to warn him about his wicked way in order to save his life—that wicked person will die for his iniquity. Yet I will hold you responsible for his blood."

This verse, in the context of the surrounding passages, describes how God appointed Ezekiel as a watchman over the exiled rebel Israelites. God is telling Ezekiel that when he hears a word from His (God's) mouth, he is to deliver a warning to the Israelites. And verse 18 is one of those warnings for both them and Ezekiel.

What does that have to do with inviting people to church, Tony? Hmm, let me think. If the Holy Spirit is guiding you to invite someone to church, there must be a reason and purpose for that invitation, no matter what you think the response will be. That was a person you were meant to reach out to with that invite, but essentially you told God, "No, I don't feel comfortable doing that," which is also disobedience to the Holy Spirit's prompting. Well, guess what?

## **God will hold us accountable for the people we could have reached but didn't.**

I don't know about you, but I don't want to stand before Jesus someday and explain why I chose my comfort over someone else's eternity.

# **Jesus's Invitation Strategy**

And back to the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus showed us how to do it through His own actions. His invitation strategy can be summed up in four action items—GO, CONNECT, RELATE, & EXPECT.

## 1. GO - Move Toward People

Jesus didn't set up a booth and wait. He went to the beach, the marketplace, the tax collector's office. **You have to GO where the people are—your workplace, your neighborhood, your gym, your kids' school. Stop waiting for them to come to you.**

*Action: This week, find three places you frequent where you encounter unchurched people.*

## 2. CONNECT - Make It Personal

"Follow ME." Not "follow religion," not "follow the church," but "follow ME." **When you invite someone, CONNECT it to the relationship: "Come with ME. Sit with ME. Let ME introduce you to my church family."** This reassures them that you will be right there with them.

*Action: Practice saying "Come with me" instead of "You should go to church sometime."*

## 3. RELATE - Speak Their Language

He told fishermen He would make them "fishers of men." He used their language and experience. **Don't invite people to "get saved" or "find religion." RELATE to what they need—hope, purpose, community, answers.**

*Action: Consider your ONE's biggest challenge right now. How can the church assist with that specific need?*

## 4. EXPECT - Believe for Their Yes

He didn't say, "Think about it and get back to me." He said, "Follow me," and waited for their response. **When you invite someone, expect them to say yes. Your faith should be contagious.**

*Action: Before you invite them, pray and declare: "God, I believe [name] is going to say yes."*

## Practical Tools for Invitation

Here are actual words you can use:

**The Relationship Invite:** "Hey, my church means a lot to me, and you mean a lot to me. I'd love for you to see what I experience there. Would you like to come with me this Sunday?"

**The Benefit Invite:** "We're doing a series on dealing with depression/relationships/money. I think you'd really get something out of it. Want to check it out with me?"

**The Event Invite:** "We're having this amazing service for Easter/Thanksgiving/Christmas. I think you'd love it. Can I save you a seat next to me and my family?"

**The Persistent Invite:** "I know you said you couldn't come last time, but this week we're talking about [relevant topic]. I really think you'd connect with it. What do you say?"

## Removing the Barriers

As part of our invitation, we want to make it difficult for them to come up with excuses.

- **"I don't have anything to wear."** This is one I hear quite often. "Come as you are. Seriously. Jeans and a T-shirt are perfect."
- **"I don't know anyone."** "You'll know me. I'll introduce you to everyone and sit with you."
- **"I'll feel awkward."** "I felt the same way my first time. I'll be right there with you."
- **"I don't have a way to get there."** "I'll pick you up. What time works for you?"

## The Holy Spirit's Role

One important thing to remember—**You're not doing this alone.** If the Holy Spirit led you to invite, He will be right there with you during the invitation.

God is already working in their hearts before you even approach them and speak. It's not your job to convert them—that's the Holy Spirit's role. Your responsibility is to get them to the place where God can work.

Stop putting the pressure on yourself to have all the answers, to be the perfect Christian, or to never mess up. Just be obedient to invite. Let God handle the rest.

## What If We All Did This?

Imagine if each one of us here invited just one person in the next 30 days. That would double our attendance. But more importantly, we could potentially double the number of people who hear the gospel, experience God's love, and find hope in Jesus.

**Our invitation could be the link in the chain that leads to someone's salvation.**

If we don't invite anyone, if we simply keep coming to church each Sunday, consuming the gospel for ourselves and not sharing it, if we keep our faith locked inside these four walls, people will continue to die without Jesus. Families will keep falling apart without hope. Coworkers will keep struggling with depression, anxiety, and defeat without ever knowing there's a God who loves them.

**Our silence could cost someone their eternity.**

## Your Assignment - Right Now

Okay, here's your homework. Yep, I know you didn't think I was going to let you leave here without making a commitment. Here's your assignment:

- 1. Think about your ONE** right now. Close your eyes and identify one person in your life who needs Jesus. Someone who's struggling, searching, or just surviving. God's placing someone on your heart at this moment. Don't overthink it—trust your first instinct.
- 2. Write their name down.** I want you to physically write their name on your bulletin, in your phone, or anywhere. Make it real.
- 3. Text someone their name.** Right now, I want you to text someone in your life—your spouse, your small group leader, a friend in church—and tell them who your ONE is. Say, "I'm committing to invite [name] to church. Pray for me and hold me accountable."
- 4. Commit to inviting them this week, NOT** next week. Not when it's convenient. **THIS WEEK!** Before next Sunday.
- 5. Believe God for their yes.** Don't invite them expecting them to say no. Invite them, trusting that God has been preparing their heart and they will say yes.

(Give people 2-3 minutes to actually do this)

## The Challenge

Bridge Family, here's my challenge to you: **Let's become the church that this community recognizes for one thing—we invite people.**

Not because we're fixated on numbers. Not because we need their money. But because we've discovered something too good to keep to ourselves.

Let us be known as the church where people say, "Those folks over at the Bridge are always inviting others. They must truly believe in what they have."

**Your ONE is waiting. They might not realize they're waiting, but they are.**

What are they waiting for, you ask? They're waiting for someone to care enough about their eternity to risk an uncomfortable conversation and invite them into a community where they can find hope, healing, and purpose.

**That someone is you.**

## A Personal Appeal

I'll end with this—none of us should have to live with regret over the invitations to come to church with us that we never made, conversations we never had about Jesus, or opportunities to witness and invite that we let slip away.

Don't let comfort win over courage.

Don't be at someone's funeral someday wishing you had invited them to church. Don't carry the burden of knowing you could have shared the gospel but chose comfort instead.

My tagline that I use at the end of all my emails says this: Give a man a fish, he'll eat for a day; show a man how to fish, he'll eat for a lifetime; introduce a man to the Creator of fish, he'll eat for an eternity.

**Your ONE needs you to be brave for five minutes so they can have hope for eternity.**

## Prayer

*Father, forgive us for our silence when You've called us to speak. Forgive us for our comfort when people are dying without hope. Give us supernatural boldness to invite the people You've placed in our lives. Break our hearts for the lost the way Your heart is broken. Help us see people the way You see them—not as interruptions or projects, but as Your beloved children who need to come home. Give us the words to say, the courage to say them, and faith to believe You'll work through our simple invitations. Holy Spirit, prepare the hearts of our ONES even now. Make them hungry for You, open to invitation, ready to say yes. We trust You to do what only You can do through our obedience to invite. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

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### Your Commitment:

- You've identified your ONE
- You've texted their name to someone for accountability
- You're inviting them THIS WEEK
- You're believing God for their yes

**Don't leave here without doing this. Someone's eternity depends on it.**

**Go be brave for five minutes. Go change a life. Go get your ONE.**