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Colossians 4:2-6; Luke 5:27-32

Rev. Bruce Stanley

www.waitara.anglican.com.au

SERIES OVERVIEW:

Week 1: Engaging with God

Week 2: Invitation

Week 3: Mission

Week 4: Welcoming



INVITATION: 2014 – YEAR OF MISSION

What's the best invitation you've ever received?!

The worst invitation you've ever received?!

- Sometimes you just DON'T want to go! (3 pics)

Invitations often depend on three things:

1. The person who's inviting you.
2. What the event is.
3. And if you're actually available.

But you invite your best friend to Church, and they're free, they might say "No"! Because invitations are also about: "Do I WANT to go?!"

If you invite someone to church, are they thinking: I really like _____. I think I'll go. That could be interesting!

Or are they thinking: "Yuk!! What's THAT going to be like? I think I have something else on every Sunday for the rest of my life."

When we invite people to church, or a church event, they might not actually want to go... ever!

But is that worth the risk of rejection? Is it worth taking the risk ask 10 people in order to get maybe ONE person say yes and come along to church or a church event?

Now, I'm going to assume that we **want** to invite people along to our church community, because I'm assuming that we **want** to see people saved, and an invitation seems like a logical step towards helping someone investigate a relationship with God. So how do we make this a place where we invite people to join us?

STEP 1 – Get others to PRAY

In Colossians 4:3, Paul writes:

3And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ

Prayer is the first thing we need. Paul actually asks OTHERS to pray for him. Prayer is how we simply say to God – I trust you – go before **me**. And if it's your will, prepare this person to say YES to my invitation.

Step 1 is to ask for prayer. Before we step out. Before we invite. Yet it is the one thing we sometimes forget to make time for. And you don't just pray. WE pray. For you. This is a group effort. Step 1 – ask someone to pray for you as you invite someone.

And here's the second step:

STEP 2 – PRAY yourself!

Colossians 4:5

5Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. 6Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

Paul knows that we need to be wise in the words we use when we talk to people – whether it's about sharing the gospel with them, or if it's about inviting them to a church event or just being a friend to them in their life. Whatever WITNESS we are involved in, we need wisdom.

We don't pray for 3 hours and then say to a good friend: "Hey, so I think you're going to hell, and you need to come to Church, or I can't be your friend anymore." That's not wise!

But wisdom helps us with the words, the opportunities, the conversation. And that wisdom comes from God – **through prayer!**

We need wisdom in the way we approach people, but also in the everyday way we talk with them. We are ALWAYS witnessing as disciples of Jesus. We can never say: "I'm going out with friends, but I'm not going to be a witness for Jesus tonight. If someone asks me if they can visit my church I'll say; 'can we talk tomorrow, this is kind of my night off!'

We should **always** be seeking wisdom in the way we talk to people. ALWAYS looking for opportunities to invite them into the community of God. And we must ALWAYS be careful and thoughtful in the way we are prepared to give answers about our faith.

So:

STEP 1 – get others to pray for YOU, for open doors.

STEP 2 – pray for wisdom in the way you act and speak and how you make the most of every opportunity.

And STEP 3 – let's look at Luke 5:

This is the story about Jesus and Levi the tax Collector. Jesus sees Levi and invites him to follow him – which means "Leave everything and become my disciple!" And Levi did. He actually becomes an apostle and changes his name to Matthew. And Levi held a banquet for Jesus with lots of other tax collectors and "sinners".

Now, tax collectors were not popular people in those days. They collected taxes for the Romans and added a bit more for themselves. They were notoriously immoral people who ripped off whoever they could to make themselves a fortune.

And so Jesus inviting a tax collector to be his disciple was ridiculous! And Jesus eating at a banquet with lots of tax collectors was **really** ridiculous. Why would this righteous man, Jesus, keep company with tax collectors and other sinners?!

Because, says Jesus in verse 31:

"It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. 32I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

Healthy people don't need a doctor. Sick people do. Jesus came to bring forgiveness to sinners. And so he invites the worst of sinners in their society to follow him. Why? Because they need him. Because they need forgiveness.

So step 3 is...

STEP 3 – INVITE! Invite ANYONE!

Jesus looked past Levi's current situation to see what he really **needed**.

And we need to do the same. Instead of thinking: "Would this person 'fit' into our Church?", we must ask the question: "Does this person need to know Jesus?!"

And WHO needs to know Jesus? Everyone. Because everyone has sin to be dealt with. Everyone needs forgiveness. Everyone needs eternal life. And in the end, it's not up to us who God calls to follow him. We don't know, just by looking at someone, if God has called **them** to know **him**. So who DO we invite?

Anyone. And everyone. There can be no-one outside our sights when it comes to inviting people into our community. Sometimes we see barriers: like people of a different faith, or people of a different socio-economic background, or people with mental illness, or people in different family situations to us. But God doesn't see those barriers. EVERYONE needs him.

And if we follow those first two steps – having others pray, and praying ourselves for wisdom and good conversations, the rest is really up to God.

Let me finish with this thought:

BROWN BANANA

Do you ever have to throw out fruit that's gone off? My favourite is the black banana! It starts to go from yellow to brown, a few spots, then more spots, then eventually it turns black and goes all squishy. And often it sits there for ages because no one wants to throw it out, but no one is sure if it's still ok to eat! And so we watch it slowly turn from yellow to black and then finally it gets thrown out.

Invitations can be like that. We can wait and wait until the "right time", then we might think it's too late and the moment has passed. Then we wait and wait, until eventually we throw out the opportunity altogether.

Invite people while the banana is still yellow!

The "right time" is when you actually invite someone. The right time is when you first have the idea that you COULD invite that person. No-one has ever said to me: "Gee, I'm not coming to your church, but if you'd waited another few days, I probably would have!"

Sometimes there is **never** a good time to invite someone. So one time is as bad as the next. So what do we do? Never invite them, and never give them the chance? Or take the risk and just invite them? They might say no. But I think Jesus' philosophy was this: "Give everyone the opportunity to say "no"! Because only then will they also have the opportunity to say "Yes"!"

So, let's get more practical. What do we invite people **to**?

1. Personal invitations are great. Invite them to dinner at your home. Invite them for a night out. BE their friend. Jesus was called the "friend" of tax collectors and sinners. He didn't just say: "Levi, follow me". He went and had dinner with him! We can ALL start there. Be a friend. Have dinner.
2. Then there are Church invitations.
 - a. Invite someone along to a Sunday service. At least they will KNOW that they CAN come along. Many people don't think they're "allowed" to just come along to Church.
 - b. Invite people to a special event – like a social night, or Christmas Carols or Easter services.
 - c. And finally, this year we have several "invite nights" – we're running evenings on "Can you trust the Bible?", "Science and Faith", we have a doctor coming to speak about sex and sexuality. We've invited a Psychologist to come and speak about raising children. All of these are great opportunities to invite people to a helpful and interesting evening, which just happens to be run by a Christianity community.

So there it is:

1. Pray for doors to be opened.
2. Pray for wisdom and opportunities.
3. **GO** – invite someone. Don't wait until the banana turns brown! Invite them to your home. Invite them to an event. Invite them to church. Invite a tax collector. Invite a person from another faith. Invite **someone**, because we have **nothing** to lose, and they have **everything** to gain!

Let's pray now.

Colossians 4:2-6

2Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. **3**And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. **4**Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. **5**Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. **6**Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

Luke 5:27-32

27After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. "Follow me," Jesus said to him, **28**and Levi got up, left everything and followed him.

29Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them. **30**But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?"

31Jesus answered them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. **32**I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."