

Intro: Casey and I showing up to the Healey's house a week early. No cars. Maybe we are early. Maybe we are late. Maybe everyone parked on a different street. Maybe it's a surprise party for us. Wrong. Wrong. Wrong. Wrong. We came the wrong week. Now my wife maintains that I simply misread it but I contend that it was the invitations fault for being so confusing. I am not sure if you have recognized this lately but party invitations have gotten exponentially more difficult to figure out. In fact, I would say invitations and the parties they lead to are one of the most confusing social practices of our culture.

Take for instance, the possibilities of dress listed on an invitation for an upcoming party:

Black tie, formal, white tie, ultra formal, black tie optional, creative black tie, Texas black tie, semi-formal, After five, business formal, cocktail attire, informal, casual, festive attire, dressy casual and casual.

And that's just the dress code expectations. Do I bring something or not bring something? What about the time? It says 8pm but we all know no one will be there at 8pm or did they say 8pm instead of 7pm because they really wanted us there at 8pm? And then I read the invitation for the proposed activities of the party- and it says "having fun." What in the world does that mean? Will it be dancing? Bobbing for apples? Charades? All of this confusion stems from the party invitation. Invitations are confusing because people are confusing. I would argue you can tell quite a bit about a person and how they view things by who they invite and how they invite people to parties.

I want to show you a passage in the Bible where Jesus is invited to a party. No less than 13 times in 24 verses, the word invite or invitation comes up. It is central to this passage. And its got everything- drama, awkwardness, tension. And at the center of this story is a simple idea- invitation. I think Jesus chose to show up and cause some trouble at a party because they are one of our greatest social expressions. You can learn a lot about someone when you figure out who they invite and how they invite people to a party.

Two worldviews, two visions of God emerge at this party. Two contrasting types of people. And I want to ask you a simple question- what kind are you? BECAUSE it says everything about you- your relationship with God and your relationship with others. And just to be clear I am not talking really talking about party invitations- this is much deeper.

Luke 14: 1-11

I. Those who invite to get invited (those who give based on an immediate reward)

- A. Jesus has been invited by some Pharisees to a party of sorts. And this was no small deal. Invitations were a big deal in this culture. How and who you invited mattered.
- B. Jesus recognizes in this house that the Roman culture of honor, shame and patronage had leaked into the Jewish community. Honor, shame and patronage was a system of reciprocity and social advancement. In this culture, you could not simply have lunch with any person- if you social, economic status did not match up- you did not mix. Unless, you knew someone who knew someone. You could party your way up the social ladder. If you invited a low level person into your house, they might invite you back to their house where there might a medium level person, and then after meeting them, you could invite them to dinner and they might invite you back and you might meet a high level person, and on and on it goes.
- C. Seneca the Younger- a writer, thinker and Statesman. 1<sup>st</sup> century Roman said in his work *On Benefits* of patronage- the giving and receiving of favors in the 1<sup>st</sup> century world, “the practice that constitutes the chief bond of human society.”
- D. We are so used to it in our culture, that our fortunes can change overnight. One day you can have no power, influence or cash and in the blink of an eye, you can skyrocket through the social stratosphere. Not so- in this culture. If you were a slave, you were probably staying a slave, if you were a fisherman, you were staying a fisherman, if you were a tax-collector you were staying a collector.
- E. But the Pharisees made the mistake of inviting a man who himself invited slaves to become free, fisherman to become apostles and tax-collectors to become spiritual leaders.
- F. In this culture- you could advance yourself by knowing and being known by the right people- and the way you could do that often was by inviting the right people to the right party. It was all about the invitation. Who you invited and why you invited them mattered.
- G. Jesus is now surrounded by those who invite to get invited. This is about much more than your attitude towards parties. These people’s view of God and themselves is on display in this passage.
- H. vv.1-6 These Pharisees are rule followers who believe the way to God is by stringently keeping certain commands. And one command they wanted to keep was not working on the Sabbath. And they believed healing was working. And so Jesus is now confronted with a diseased man- he has dropsy by the way- which we would probably call edema today. Painful, obvious swelling. And they might have actually invited this obviously diseased man, just to see what Jesus would do. Jesus has already healed people on the Sabbath. Some Pharisees saw him do it once but they wanted proof- they wanted to see if he would do it again. It’s hard to imagine anything more detestable- they would rather a person stay pain rather than be healed because they might be breaking God’s law.
- I. When you live in a world and abide by its rules that you can advance yourself if you are good enough, it counts for parties but it also counts towards your

- view of God. These people believed they could in a sense do things for God in order that He would have to do for them. This invite to be invited mindset is the very foundation of who they are. They are favor-seekers. They are earners, they are entitled boot-strappers. And they would rather see someone remain hurt or diseased because there were rules to keep and a God to impress so that He would obligated to do something for you.
- J. It is true for how they interact with God and it is true for how they interact with one another.
  - K. Vv. 7-11
  - L. These types of meals usually happened in a horseshoe shape around a table. The host, the person of most importance would be at the center or base of the horseshoe- and as you went outwards to the tips, people were deemed less and less powerful, less and less esteemed.
  - M. What would probably normally happen was a wild game of pharisaical musical chairs. The host is at the top of the U, I need to get as close as I can. Not because I particularly like the host but because I want the glory of being close. I want the honor. Invite to get invited people are obsessed with the immediate reward. The glory, fame, riches that I can get right now. If it is all about me, then it is all about what I get right here and now.
  - N. Again this invite to get invited mentality is much more than party invitations- it is a whole way of seeing life. It is a skewed way of seeing God because you think you can do enough for God that he will be forced to do for you, and this invite to get invited mindset is interested in self-promotion and preservation.
  - O. Illus- Michelle and Tariq Walahi- about two years ago they have the unbecoming distinction of being party crashers. They crashed a state dinner at the White House. terrible distinction of crashing the president's party. You don't know him, you don't care about him, you just want some of the glory.
  - P. Invite to get invited people are not genuinely interested in others, only what we can get from others.
  - Q. Invite to get invited people have a flawed view of God that includes entitlement to the grace they have been given. And out of the overflow of that flawed worldview comes a flawed way of loving others- loving so that. SO that you get something back. Giving to get an immediate reward.
  - R. Illus- Jimmy Kimmel- parents ate the kids candy. What kind of person does that? Comical look at the way our world works today- intergenerational- many parents are eating their kids candy. Economically, politically.
  - S. And if it is true for socio-political perspectives, then it is true for the church. Many churches are eating their kids candy because they are invite to get invited churches. They are more interested in self-preservation and self-promotion than reaching the next generation.
  - T. Barna numbers about young adult Christians. In the last twenty years, the amount of unchurched in this category has gone up by almost 30%. That disturbing trend makes you wonder where we will be 20 years from today. Will the light of Christiantity go out on our watch. Are we heading to a post-christian culture that looks like much of Western Europe?

- U. Invite to get invited churches are full of invite to get invited people. These people feel entitled to God's grace which leads them to be stingy with it towards others. And so they will not stretch, bend or sacrifice for the sake of those who aren't currently in their midst. They are taking the candy of the next generation because it hurts too much to change.

(Let's look at our second option from this passage)

II. Those who invite because they were invited (those who live based on eternal return)

- A. I want to read you the rest of this passage. Jesus has seen these people trying to work their way to God all the while alienating people in their midst while grabbing for power, and so he decides to show them another way.
- B. Vv. 12-24
- C. The second group is those who invite because they were invited. Once again, we see these people's view of God and view of one another.
- D. Jesus tells a parable with three main groups- a powerful man who is the God character, the original invitees- who are the Jews and the new invitees who represent broken people who recognize God's grace and accept.
- E. Their foundation, their view of God can be seen in verses 15-24. You probably have heard this before and in its broadest original sense, Jesus is castigating the Jews. They were invited as the chosen people but they had constantly been distracted this world and rebuffed the invitation of God. They are distracted by wealth- the man with the land, job- the man with the oxen, and relationships- the man who needs to go and see about his wife. All of these people have little need for God because all of their needs are being met. Or so they think. The original invitees reject this once in a lifetime invitation, and it is here that we see the heart of God.
- F. The God character tells his servant- go find those who know they are broken. The downcast of society- the poor, crippled, blind and lame. This is of course a spiritual look at those God invites into his Kingdom- Jesus would say the KOG is for such as these during the sermon on the mount- the poor in spirit, those who mourn, those who hunger and thirst. Not because there is something intrinsically good about suffering but because it allows us to know our need for God. People who recognize they are not self-sufficient, good enough, smart enough or successful enough. These are people that come to the party.
- G. If you understand this worldview, it's because you are an invite because you were invited type of person. You recognize your broken, helpless, sinful situation. This is so totally counterintuitive to the invite to get invited person. You realize God owes you nothing but you also know you are in desperate need of him.
- H. When you realize you were invited- not because you had something to offer or because you were good enough, smart enough or kept enough commands, when you realize you were invited because of the grace of God, then you become an invite because you were invited person. Your whole life is lived in light of this moment that you were invited by the King.

- I. Illus- the verb for invite in this passage is kaleo. Which in its broadest sense means to call but it also means invite. Here is something interesting, the author of the this book Luke, who also authored Acts is assumed by most to have been a gentile. Here is the interesting part, this gentile( this outsider) uses this verb, “to call or invite” more times in his Gospel than all the other Gospels combined. In fact the Gospel of Luke uses kaleo more than any other NT book. Between Luke/Acts- they use 40% of kaleo’s instances. Wny do I bring this up? Because, this gentile outsider realized what an honor it was to be called. He knew how precious it was to be invited and it shaped everything he did and including how he saw Jesus and how he wrote.
- J. So, while being invited as a bearing on your eternal destination, it is also has a bearing on how you live right now. You begin to live a gracious life of giving, not to get but because you were given to first. Because God reached out to you first.
- K. This whole idea is present in 12-14. Dr. Thomas Constable, a professor at DTS says that Jesus uses a style of teaching that infers- do less of this and more of this. Not necessarily- stop this and only do this. It is an ongoing style of Jesus. So while this is a difficult teaching to put into practice, Jesus is not necessarily saying never eat with your family or friends, but he does say do more of this. Invite those who never get an invitation. Invite the same people God favors- people who are broken, downcast, diseased. Invite those who cannot repay you.
- L. I asked each of you this morning, what kind of person are you. The two options are the invite to get invited person, one who gives for immediate reward. Or are you an invite because you were invited person, one who lives for the eternal reward. I am guessing you were tracking with me up until this point, your recognize you are spiritually bankrupt and that God’s grace alone saves you but now comes the application. Do you invite others in the same manner you were invited? Do you live for an eternal reward.
- M. Jesus says in these couple of verses- your life should be spent inviting people who can do nothing for you. Investing in places where you can expect no immediate return. Sowing seed though you will most likely never see the fruit.
- N. Illus- I have found the perfect phrase to encapsulate this idea. Nelson Henderson was a farmer and soldier, and he is not really famous for too much. He devoted himself to his family and his country and one quote kind of sums up his life- he said, “ the true meaning of life is to plant trees under whose shade you do not expect to sit.”
- O. Essentially, he was saying, invite because you were invited. Bless those who simply cannot repay you. Sow seeds that will reap an eternal harvest.
- P. The problem is twofold- 1)it is hard to invest in things that do not personally benefit you 2) It is difficult to invest in things in which you probably won’t see fruit or a reward in this lifetime.
- Q. Jesus recognizes the difficulty of this teaching but he makes a promise- if you love the least of these, if you invite those who don’t normally get an invitation- you will have a great reward at the resurrection of the righteous.

- R. What kind of person are you? What kind of church are we? There are plenty of invite to get invited churches. Those who are obsessed with making everything a bit better and more comfortable for themselves. Serving their family and their purposes first and foremost.
- S. Our challenge and our goal as a church is to be an invite because we were invited church. We are trying to plant trees of hope throughout this community. That's why we serve the refugees of this city. That is why we have a food pantry. That is why we serve Conrad HS. And that is why we plant churches.
- T. You want to talk about the definition of investing where you don't get repaid and where you don't get an immediate reward. Then plant churches. Planting churches is one of the most effective ways to spread the Gospel and it is one of the greatest evidences of healthy and thriving churches.
- U. Any church can reinvest in themselves. Any church can mentor at a school where their own children grow. We are proposing some wild things at this church- give your time, your resources, and your gifts away in way that you do not expect a return.
- V. That is why this church started FWR over a year ago. I have had the pleasure of heading up that movement. And I want you to know we do what we do there because of the example we saw there. At the core of our very DNA is a desire to plant trees under whose shade we do expect to sit.
- W. For those of you who don't know, FWR meets in Hotchkiss elementary- an underperforming, under-resourced school that serves Vickery Meadows, one of the most troubled neighborhoods in our city. 99.9% of the kids are under the poverty line, many of them come from broken homes. Many kids already have experienced the dark udnebrely of Dallas with its drugs, gangs and prostitution. These kids are the people Jesus was talking about. They aren't the ones who get invited to parties.
- X. Illus- Video of FWR fall festival. So- we invited these kids to a party. I met three different people from this party who just moved here from Iraq. They have seen two wars already in their lifetime, lost loved ones, and now have become refugees. And they got to come to a party to make them and their children feel special. And we got up just for a minute and told people that we were a church and we wanted to love them because Jesus first loved us.
- Y. FWR wants to be like you guys- We want to grow as an invite because you were invited church. And we are at a crossroads, because Dalls ISD has a policy that you cannot stay in their facilities for more than 2 years. So- we are looking for what is next and we think we have found a place in the Northlake Center. A place to rent for the next 6 years with an option for 5 more after that. And we see it as a place of worship and a hub of blessing. But it needs to be finished out. So I am asking you today to plant a tree under whose shade you will not sit. Invest in this new church formation and I will promise you that we will continue to plant trees in our community under whose shade we will not sit. We want to continue and invest liberally for the sake of the Kingdom.

Z. Conclusion: I'll finish with this- the reason why we do all of this is Jesus a man from Nazareth. He lived a life of inviting people on the fringe. Those who were unclean and unworthy. And then he marched towards a Roman cross and was executed and took the death that we deserved for our sin. I want you to see something. That wooden cross, that tree was planted by Jesus so that we could rest under its shade. It costs him everything and he did it for us. I would love for you to invest in FWR specifically but more than that today, I want you to be an invite because you were invited person. I want you to help us plant the trees of the gospel all around this city, so that many more may rest under the shade of his grace.