

### **Invite (Phil:2:1-11) & Talk (Col 4:2-6) – How to share our faith**

I like party invites. I like dinner invites. I like wedding invites. I like invites to spend time with friends. Why? Because it involves me in people's lives and specially because I am an extrovert and I get my energy from being with other people. I like invites. So I wanted to bring you the third in our series on how to share our faith. And the two topics are invite and talk.

So let's begin with invite. After all we have an 'invite a friend' service next week. But why should we invite people to things? I mean, it may not be a perfect service. It will not have an international speaker. Our friend might say no. Our friends might be sick of us asking. Our friends might live a long way away. Besides, you know, I was thinking of playing golf that Sunday. I mean why should we invite?....Some reasons....

Firstly, God wants his house full. Do you remember the parable in Luke 14? Jesus tells of someone who gave a great dinner and invited many – but they all kept making excuses for not coming, so the host says, "Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame."<sup>22</sup> And the slave said, "Sir, what you ordered has been done, and there is still room."<sup>23</sup> Then the master said to the slave, "Go out into the roads and lanes, and compel people to come in, so that my house may be filled.

Well the point of the parable is about those who refuse to come to the party, but the secondary point is that God wants his house to be full. And if one says no, that shouldn't stop us asking a second and a third. And if the rich say no, we should ask the poor. And if those who live close by say no, we should ask those who live far away. God wants his house to be full and he uses you and me in the process of filling it up.

Secondly, we should invite people because Jesus is inherently attractive. Do you remember the women at the well in John 4 – I'll preach on that very passage next week – the women says to her friends, <sup>29</sup>‘Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done!’ She was so excited by who Jesus was she simply went and invited her friends to come and meet him. You don't need to apologise about inviting people to see what you believe about Jesus. Jesus, and in fact his church, is inherently attractive. As Peter said two weeks ago, if you love Jesus you'll want to invite your friends to meet him.

Thirdly, we should invite our friends because you bless your friends with the invitation. Revelation 19:9: ‘Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the lamb.’ Those who eventually come to Christ will be eternally blessed; they will not only have eternal life in the future but will understand and know the meaning and purpose of life now. They will begin a glorious relationship with God now. They will get a sense of how the whole world fits together and how it is supposed to work..... in the negative, we know that without Christ our friends and family will be eternally lost....but with Christ and in Christ our friends will be blessed.

Fourthly, we should invite our friends because life should not all be about what we want. Philippians 2 holds out Jesus as a great model of one who served others. One who left heaven, one who left his glory behind and came to earth; coming not even as an earthly king but as a slave. A slave even to death on a cross, in order that we might be saved. And if Christ did this for us, we too should do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than ourselves. Each of us should look not to our own interests but to the interests of others. When you think about inviting your friends, do you think of your own interests – ooh what will they think of me; maybe they'll think I'm a loopy Christian; maybe

they'll stop being my friend? Or do you think of their interests – they need to come to Christ – will I take courage to invite them or not?

We should invite our friends because God wants his house full; because Jesus is inherently attractive; because you bless your friends by inviting them and because we should look to the interests of others, just like Jesus did.

Now we have an invite a friend service next week, but that's not the only thing it's worth inviting a friend to. So what should we invite people to? You might want to invite a friend to read a Christian book with you that explains Christianity...like *A Sneaking Suspicion* or *The Case for Christ*. You might want to invite them to one of our bridge building activities – it's why we love it when you offer to run such things – Toolbox or Air Force concert or gingerbread night or wine tasting. You might want to invite someone to your Bible study group. You might invite someone to just one of our normal church services. You might invite someone to a special service – like next week or a praise party or a Christmas service. You might want to invite a friend to an Alpha course that we'll run next year. You might simply want to invite a friend to have dinner with you and with two of your Christian friends. There are lots of ways and places to invite people to engage with Jesus....and next week's service would be a good one.

Again, I'd like to give 10 practical tips on how we should invite people to events as well. One, be intentional. Plan to invite people to events and always be prepared for unexpected opportunities. Try to get fliers for events early, and carry them with you.

Two, don't talk yourself out of it. Invite people confidently – God is at work. You don't need to make excuses for an invite – be confident and trust that God is at work by his spirit.

Three, be excited about the event – if you are ho hum about it, that won't attract people to want to come. Again if there is not an event here that you find attractive to invite a friend to – well, come and help make one.

Four, don't give up just because you get one or three or ten knockbacks. If one friend really doesn't respond – move on, ask someone else – but don't give up.

Five, it's often good to add a meal with the invitation. So if you are inviting a person next week, also ask them for lunch or dinner back at your place or in Bourke Road...or out for a coffee or a drink afterwards.

Six, become known as an inviter. Invite people to all sorts of things – movies, meals, concerts, kids' things – then it won't be a surprise when you also invite someone to a church thing.

Seven, it's often good to offer to pick up the person you have invited. It saves them having to walk into an unfamiliar environment by themselves.

Eight, give them an SMS or email or phone call to confirm the details in the previous week.

Nine, pray constantly for the people you invite – Satan will try and put every barrier in their way to hearing the gospel.

Ten, still go to the events even if no one is coming with you – you may well encourage other people's friends.

Invite people, for in the end, 'at the name of Jesus, every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.....

My preferred way of learning is not by reading. Sure I like reading enough, but I much prefer to learn by listening to people talk. I like listening to John Faine on 774, even though I don't always agree with him, because I feel I learn about contemporary issues. I like going to seminars on Christian topics. I much prefer going to a conference on a Christian theme than reading a text book on the same theme. I like to hear and respond. And then I learn by talking through the topic or idea or issue with friends.

And the second part of our sermon today is on talking the faith. Again let me start by asking the question, why should we talk about our faith? I mean isn't it a private matter, and I'm an introvert, and I'm not very confident and my friends will call me a Bible basher.... Why should we talk about our faith?

Firstly, we should talk about our faith because we have been instructed to. So our reading from 1Peter 3:15: 'Always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you.' Or as we heard from Colossians 4 last week, 'Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt.' You know it's a helpful encouragement to live the gospel when St Francis said, 'Preach the gospel at all times and when necessary use words'. But it can also be a misleading statement. We are actually instructed to be ready to use our words to talk about our faith.

Like that, we should talk about our faith because people need to hear as well as see the gospel. So Romans 10: 'But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?' God chooses to use people like you and me, and the words we say, to bring people into a relationship with him.

Again, we should talk about our faith because we love people and because we want them to be saved. We want them to know God. We want them to have eternal life. 2 Corinthians 5 again: 'For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all.'

Now don't hear me say we all need to be Billy Grahams or we all need to be John Dixons. To respond to this sermon does not mean you need to book, fill and speak at the tennis centre and have 20,000 come to Christ. Ephesians 4 points out that 'Some are evangelists' – that is not all of us are gifted evangelists. Nevertheless, we are all called to be ready to use our words to give an account of our faith and to season our speech for the gospel.

So let me ask, what should we talk about? Firstly, just learn to talk about anything to do with Christianity. Talk about church life. Talk about the Air Force concert, or the Tear dinner or Woman to Women or the men's group or the praise party or the band at church. Talk about your home group. Talk about what the preacher said on Sunday. Talk about the thing you were reading in the Bible. Talk about the person in need you are praying for at church. And you know – do that with each other after the service as well. For if you won't or can't talk about Christian things with your Christian friends, it's hard to imagine how you'll season your speech with salt with your non-Christian friends.

Then, it is worth talking about hot topics. If you see something about Richard Dawkins in the paper, work out how you'd respond. If you hear something about Access Ministries on the radio, work out what you think and be ready to talk about it with your work colleagues. Have a go at talking about the resurrection if you go to a funeral – sensitively of course – but if your hope is in Jesus who rose from the dead, why not talk about the most significant event in history in a context where it's so relevant?

Although having said all that, when you think about, ‘what should I talk about?’ The answer is like the kids’ talk – it’s always Jesus. Try to get back to talking about something about Jesus. You can end up in all sorts of philosophical debates about the existence of God, or intelligent design or whatever...but in the end what matters is getting our friends thinking about Jesus.

Finally then, a few more of Greg’s tips on ‘How should we talk?’

1. You don’t need to know all the answers. If you love Jesus and you love people, you’re ready to go.
2. Having said that it is worth learning some sort of answer to the main 5 or 6 questions that people ask. Aren’t all religions the same? Hasn’t much evil been done in the name of Christianity? Hasn’t science disproved God? Isn’t the Bible inaccurate and made up? How can God be good if there is so much suffering in the world? No one can come back from the dead.
  - a. If you don’t know the answers, there is a DVD going around – our home group is using it – that deals with most of the questions. Or ask Peter or me if you like.
3. Know your Bible, especially the gospel stories. Often you can weave a story from Jesus in. Like, Jesus once told a story about a guy who built all these barns to store up his wealth – and then he died.... or the Father running to meet the prodigal son and so on.
4. Be proactive. You don’t have to be Billy Graham, but don’t just wait for a friend to knock on your door and say, now Greg, I want you to tell me how to become a

Christian. Spend time with your friends and as I said, talk about church and Christianity.

5. Use and practice your own story. How did you become a Christian? Or why are you still a Christian, if you've always been one?
6. Lastly, don't give up. One of my friends became a Christian a week after I began talking to them. Some of my friends and family I've been talking to on and off for 30 years now and still they haven't responded.

Revelation 22: 'It is I, Jesus, who sent my angel to you with this testimony for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.'

The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come.'

And let everyone who hears say, 'Come.'

And let everyone who is thirsty come.

Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift.'