

An Invitation to MORE  
The Year of Invitation  
2025 Kickoff Message  
Jan 4-5, 2025  
Mt 21:28-32

Introduction

- Welcome to 2025 the YEAR OF INVITATION here at Bridgeway! If you are brand new joining us, what a great time to be a part of things. Welcome. If you've been a part of BW for years, we are walking into some of the most exciting times we've had in a decade.
- God has MORE for us here at Bridgeway. More in our marriages, more in our workplaces, more in our spiritual experiences, more in our friendships...this year is about saying yes to the invitations that God issues to us. **Last year was observing the opportunities and getting the guts to jump in and try some of them. This year is about saying YES to specific assignments of God.**
- This year is jammed packed with incredible series like:
  - We kick it off with "The Greatest Hits Series" (11) – an 11 part series through the Book of John on the key teachings of Jesus that we didn't cover last year in our Gospel of Mark series. It's a series focused on **some of the greatest invitations that Jesus gave to those who were listening**.
    - Application - Each and **every week will be an invitation to change our lives and align with the Lord. This is an amazing time to bring friends and family that don't yet know the Lord**, or those who are interested in what Jesus has to say to them. Every week will be designed with them in mind.
  - Evangelism Training - After **a short training series on how to share our faith normally and naturally...**
  - 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel (16) - That's followed up by a 16-part series walking through the book of 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel to study **what an invitation to Leadership looked like for King Saul and King David**.
    - Application – **what if God is calling you to step up into a new role, a new responsibility, a new calling or assignment? How would you handle it? Are you ready? How would you get ready for something like that?**
  - Titus (8) - At the end of Summer we launch an 8-part series through the New Testament book of Titus learning about God's Invitations to His children to go deeper with Him and expand His Kingdom on Earth.
    - Application – **God has so much more for us. How do we live a Christian life of victory and purpose every day?** That's what we'll talk about in this series.
  - Joshua (11) – Through the Fall and closing the year will be an 11-part series through the Old Testament book of Joshua where we will **reflect on the challenge of walking into God's invitation to Promise of the GREATER**.
    - Application – **Sometimes the next level for us requires a serious adjustment in our lives. Many times a promotion comes after some tough battles. Just as Israel took the Promised Land, so too do we need to overcome some personal battles in our lives to begin to live into what God has for us.**

- Basic Info for Success - Today I want to give you some basic information that will set you up for success all year. It's not rocket-science but it's going to be very practical and helpful to set a foundation for us to work off of. If you are a note taker, it's go time!
- Let's Talk About Invitation...

### Lesson

- Our God is an Inviting God. He is a Sending God. He is an assignments and partnership God. **In other words: God invites us to change the world WITH HIM.** He could always do things without us, but He doesn't want to. The point of creating us is relationship with Him. Therefore **anything important happening down here on earth God wants to invite His people to be a part of it with Him so that we can bond with Him as it's happening.**
  - 5 Great Invitations of God – Although there are many special invitations from God all through our lives, most of them fall into 5 major categories:
    1. Let Me Rescue You – Salvation – the call is to **open our hearts to the Lord for the first time** and allow Him to save us. This is about receiving Jesus in our hearts, about getting a new identity as a child of God, and so much more.
    2. Know Me – Relationship – **the call is to have a personal, intimate connection with our God.** This is done through invitations to prayer, sharing our heart, shared experiences, etc.
    3. Let Me Transform You Into What I Intended – Sanctification – this is about **God making us into the people He designed us to be.** This is about change of our beliefs, thoughts, behaviors, lifestyles, etc.
    4. Follow Me – Guidance – this is about **pursuing the ways of Christ.** This is about living an active Christian lifestyle that transforms us in the process.
    5. Partner with Me – Mission – this is about **building the Kingdom of God,** doing ministry (both natural and supernatural), serving people, and transforming lives.
      - Daily invitations – **apart from the first invitation after acceptance, the rest of the invitations can be DAILY. There is MORE for us in all those areas no matter how long we have been walking with God.**
- Importance of Accepting These Invitations – **too many people in the world are going to die with tremendous regret** that they didn't live their lives with meaning. They pursued the things of this world like money, fame, influence, stuff. All of that will perish when we die. But **when we partner with God we become connected to eternal elements of life that live on after we die. When we say no to God's invitation we are choosing to live a lesser existence. When we say YES to God's invitations, we are choosing the more noble way, the higher way, the grander and more meaningful way.**
  - When God invited Noah to walk with him it **resulted in the saving and restarting of mankind.**

- When God invited Abraham to go with Him, it resulted in a brand new people group, the Jews, through whom God would come into the world.
- When God invited Moses to partner with Him in the rescuing of His people from Egypt it gave Moses a front row to some of the greatest miracles the planet has ever seen and face to face talks with God Himself.
- When God invited David to be king, the nation of Israel became what it was designed to be.
- When God invited Naaman to wash in the river 7x's he was healed of his leprosy.
- When God invited the prophet Elisha to take Elijah's place, he inherited a double portion of power.
- When God invited Nehemiah to rebuild the city of Jerusalem, the Jews were able to go back home to the Promised Land.
- When Jesus invited 12 men into His brotherhood of apostles, they healed the sick, raised the dead, cast out demons, and walked on water.
  - Why would we say no?!?!?!
- Invitation to What's Best for Us - God knows what's best for us so when He invites us He is drawing us into what He built us for. We learned in our last series in the book of Jonah what happens when God invites someone, even commands someone to partner with Him in an endeavor and that person refuses and rebels. It's not good.
  - Recapping Jonah – we remember the Jonah story, right? God tells one of His guys, a prophet named Jonah, to go into a faraway enemy city and preach to them warning that they were going to get destroyed. Jonah hated those people, so he refused and went the other way. So, God had him thrown into the sea, swallowed by a huge fish and re-racked his focus. Eventually he went and preached and the whole city repented from their sins. Jonah knew God was going to have mercy on those people and he was so angry he sat on a hill hoping the repentance plan would fail and God would destroy them anyway. And that's how it ended.
  - Reimagining Jonah – **But what if Jonah had a revival in his own heart? What if Jonah would have had a soft heart BEFORE God called him to go to preach to the Assyrians in Nineveh?** What if God called to a man who maybe still wrestled with racism, but reflected on God's grace in his own life, and went willingly? What if he sailed directly there and began to preach, only to watch God do a city-wide, mass conversion revival through his ministry?!?!? There are a lot of tough assignments in the Bible like Noah and John the Baptist, but Jonah got to be a part of a successful one. He got to a rebellious, evil, pagan people, change overnight miraculously through his preaching! **Everyone else would kill for that opportunity.** And if Jonah had the right heart, he could have sat on that hill at the end, set up an altar of worship to God and praised Him all night long for being a part of one of the greatest ministries on the planet.

- We can be that 2<sup>nd</sup> type of Jonah! I'm not promising that all of God's assignments are going to turn out with a mass revival, only that they will be meaningful, purposeful, powerful, and right.
- Receiving the Invitation – **it's very difficult to answer an invitation that you didn't know you received.** Have you ever found something in your email SPAM folder that was now out of date? Sure you have. So, **how do we know when God issues us an invitation.** Let's say that we are prepped and ready with a 'here I am, send me!' but there's nothing but crickets?
  - How God Communicates - **If we don't know how God communicates, we won't know how God invites.** So, **how does God tend to communicate with His people?** Over and over in the Bible we read the phrase, '*and the word of the Lord came to so-and-so.*' It's tempting to think that life would be so much more easy if God would leave us a voicemail or text us what He wants, right? But the deeper you look into the actual events and experiences of the stories of the Bible you see that God communicates in a lot of ways to people, the least of which is verbal or audio. Usually it involves a much more messy form of communication. Let me give you some examples:
    - Abraham's Vision - When God talked to Abraham it says that God gave his primary calling and assignment in a **VISION**.<sup>1</sup> Imagine the second-guessing on that one!
      - Solomon's famous DREAM<sup>2</sup> – **Solomon's famous conversation** with God when he received supernatural wisdom **happened in a DREAM.**
      - Moses Bush – Moses' most famous conversation with God happened through a **burning bush** in the desert,<sup>3</sup> which would cause anyone to second-guess the reality of that.
        - Nu 12:6–9 – "*And he said, "Hear my words: If there is a prophet among you, I the LORD make myself known to him in a vision; I speak with him in a dream. <sup>7</sup> Not so with my servant Moses. He is faithful in all my house. <sup>8</sup> With him I speak mouth to mouth, clearly, and not in riddles, and he beholds the form of the LORD. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?" <sup>9</sup> And the anger of the LORD was kindled against them, and he departed."*
    - Prophets<sup>4</sup> Version – God told His people that **prophets would tend to hear from Him in a dream or vision.**<sup>5</sup>
    - Gideon's Fleece – God's message to Gideon was so unclear he had to do **2 different tests** to make sure he was actually hearing God and hearing Him right.

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 15:1 – other communications were angelic visitations or God visiting Abram Himself. Usually visitations from God would come through visions and dreams.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Kings 3

<sup>3</sup> Exodus 3 – although Moses is probably one of the only few in the Bible who actually had direct audio conversations with God later in life. Dt 4:9-13 explains that the nation of Israel at the base of the mountain HEARD God's voice but didn't see any form to go with it. But even that was very, very rare.

<sup>4</sup> 2 Peter 1:21

<sup>5</sup> Numbers 12:6. Genesis 46:2 records that Jacob/Israel heard God through visions of the night.

- King David heard through others – King David heard the ‘word of the Lord’ mostly **through his prophets**: Nathan and Gad, instead of directly. And sometimes they got it wrong at first.<sup>6</sup>
  - Even when God spoke not everyone understood at first – think about the **call of Samuel** the Prophet in the temple. At first he thought it was his mentor/boss Eli.<sup>7</sup> Sometimes when Moses talked to God, God answered him through THUNDER.<sup>8</sup>
  - Sometimes God spoke but it was very quiet – Elijah heard God as a ‘still small voice’ (a whisper)<sup>9</sup> instead of a loud commanding call.
  - Discerned through music<sup>10</sup> – **Elisha** was asked for a word from the Lord and in order to do so he called for a musician to play so he could **discern the ‘voice’ of the Lord**.
    - Other unclear methods – We don’t have time to go through the other odd methods of God’s communication like the **Urim and Thummim**,<sup>11</sup> or **casting lots**.<sup>12</sup>
  - The bottom line – **God communicates all around us and in us, but it takes some reflection, some quiet, some relationship, and some prayer to discern what He’s really saying. Sometimes God is speaking through circumstances in our lives. Sometimes He is speaking through a sermon or a word of advice and wisdom. Sometimes He is putting images, thoughts, and ideas into our mind to act upon. The challenge is not that God is silent, but that we struggle to hear.**
  - Why so mysterious? – it’s a great question to ask why God is so mysterious in His communication methods. The answer could go deeply into the effects of sin and the current grand scheme plan for mankind until the consummation of this age, or we can simply look at the ministry of Jesus and realize it’s **the same reason He spoke in parables**. Parables were both revealing and mysterious. **The only way to know the meaning for sure was to get next to the teacher and ask. In other words, parables demanded a relationship to understand.** God doesn’t just want to share information, but partner in the implications of the information. This **demands proximity and connection.**
  - God is not trying to hide or be difficult – God’s intention is not to have His people left guessing what He wants from them. **God will be as clear as He NEEDS to be.** Usually what clouds our ability to understand is our unwillingness to accept it.
  - The BEST way to dial into the Lord’s communication voice – reading the **Bible**.<sup>13</sup> When we read enough of the Bible we begin to get the tone, the

<sup>6</sup> 2 Sam 7:1-4 (cf. 2 Sam 24:11)

<sup>7</sup> 1 Sam 3

<sup>8</sup> Ex 19:19

<sup>9</sup> 1 Kings 19:12

<sup>10</sup> 2 Kings 3:15

<sup>11</sup> Num 27:21

<sup>12</sup> Acts 1:26

<sup>13</sup> Most of Israel’s history was determined by their obedience to the WRITTEN Word – Dt 28:1; Josh 24:26-27. Moses heard it clearly and wrote it down. Each person didn’t hear it, they were re-read it secondhand, just like we do today.

type of content, the attitude, of God. We are able to create internal filters that help us discern if something *sounds* like Him or not.

- The longest God ever talked – the longest verbal conversation that God had with mankind was roughly **30 years** long in the **life and ministry of Jesus Christ**<sup>14</sup> (we'll give Him the first 3 years to get a hang of talking). Therefore the Gospels, the recordings of Jesus' words, are precious and powerful. They are an incredible way to know the heart of God and how He talks.
- A Year of Action – **Last year we trained ourselves to SEE opportunities and TRACK on the movement of God around us. This year is all about DOING something about it.** It's about **Action**. It's about **saying yes, and FOLLOWING THROUGH**. Too often we INTEND the right things, or even PRETEND the right things, but at the end of the day we don't do anything different. Jesus talked about that in Matthew, chapter 21:
  - Mt 21:28–32 – “[consider this...] *A man had two sons. And he went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work in the vineyard today.’*<sup>29</sup> *And he answered, ‘I will not,’ but afterward he changed his mind and went.*<sup>30</sup> *And he went to the other son and said the same. And he answered, ‘I will go, sir,’ but did not go.*<sup>31</sup> *Which of the two did the will of his father?” They said, “The first.” Jesus said to them, “Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you.*<sup>32</sup> *For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him. And even when you saw it, you did not afterward change your minds and believe him.”*
  - Pharisee Challenge Story - Jesus was challenging a group of religious people called the Pharisees with that story. They were the ones who felt like they knew everything and didn't want to be told what to do. They were the ones stuck in their own lives and couldn't be bothered. **They were religious enough to remove guilt but not religious enough to make a difference.**
  - Answering a call with bad timing is difficult for anyone of us. **God's not surprised when He asks us to do something, and we hesitate.** He knows that most of us aren't tracking with Him consistently enough to see the assignment coming so it feels out of the blue. He knows that it's difficult to do things that are uncomfortable and out of the box. He knows that we fear looking stupid more than we fear disappointing Him. He know that it's scary sometimes to pray over people we don't know or go out on a faith limb. So, it's not our hesitant hearts that offend him...it's our disobedient choices that follow.
  - We are not here for ourselves – **we are not here on this planet for ourselves.** God has filled us up with all we need, if we are His children. Therefore, with a full heart, and full lives, we are now here on this planet to care for others and to expand the Kingdom of God. The rest of the world operates off of lack

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<sup>14</sup> Hebrews 1:1-3 – Jesus is the WORD of God.

and emptiness and void. We operate off fullness and a desire to bless others.  
Therefore **an assignment from God is just what we should be waiting for.**

### Conclusion

- Invites on your bulletin each week – as you may have noticed, on our bulletins we have **a perforated portion that can be torn out to make an invitation card** for a friend or family member. It has all the pertinent information on it for them to know where and when to come to church with you.
- Constant Invites This Year - We are going to continually invite you to be a part of the body here at Bridgeway all year **through different ministries. You do NOT have to do them ALL. They are just options,** but we want you to know that you are wanted and invited into what is happening around here.