**Your Big Day: Giving an Effective Invitation**

While today’s gospel invitation is taking on a variety of forms, it still remains the unique opportunity for every Christian to invite individuals to come to faith in Jesus Christ, or to recommit to a holy lifestyle as His disciples. Regardless of the style or approach, the invitation is the responsibility of believers in their interaction with unbelievers. Our Great Commission task is to be faithful in proclaiming the gospel and asking lost people to respond to Jesus. It is the Holy Spirit’s role to bring in the harvest.

**Tips on Giving an Effective Invitation**

Many of us are most familiar with one particular kind of evangelistic invitation—the invitation to come to walk the aisle and be saved. While there is nothing wrong with inviting unbelievers to come to the front to pray and receive Christ, perhaps we should also consider other options (see Dr. Roy Fish’s types of invitations below). One other option that is highly effective is the invitation to accept Christ where the unbeliever is sitting. The details are outlined below.

**Ask people to fill out a response card.**

Response cards should be available throughout the event location or distributed to everyone through a registration packet. Feel free to use the response card provided in this section if necessary. Also, decide beforehand how you want people to return the cards to you. Do you want boxes distributed throughout the location for people to fill? Do you want people to pass them down their rows? Do you want to assign individuals to collect the cards and then direct them? Be sure to have a plan before giving the invitation.

(Click here to see a sample response card – done as docx)

After a concise presentation of the gospel, ask everyone to bow their heads and close their eyes and invite them to commit their life to Christ if they do not already have a relationship with Him. For those ready to make that decision, you can lead them in a prayer like the one below.

*Dear God, I know that Jesus is your Son and that He died on the cross and was raised from the dead. Because I have sinned and need forgiveness, I ask Jesus to come into my life. I am willing to change direction by acknowledging Him as my Lord and Savior, and by turning away from my sins. Thank you for giving me forgiveness, eternal life, and hope. In Jesus’ name, amen.*

Continue by saying, “If you prayed that prayer, please tell us about it. We want to know about your decision today so we can celebrate with you and provide you with some more information about growing in your relationship with Christ. Please take the response card and fill it out completely. Everyone please take a moment and look at the card. Notice that there is a place for your name, address, phone number, and email. We also have several boxes there for you to check. Please check the one that describes your decision today. After you have completed the card, please return it to us by \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_” (*give specific instructions here on how you want to collect the cards*).

Say a brief prayer and then allow attendees time to complete and return the cards. It is critical that each person who filled out a card is contacted. Be sure to have a good follow-up plan after the event.

[NOTE: This approach does not compromise Jesus’ command to stand unashamedly for Him. Instead, it simply allows an unbeliever to accept Christ first and then publicly profess Christ through baptism and personal witnessing. We must be careful not to make “walking the aisle” an essential component to being saved, for it is only by grace through faith that we are saved.]

**Additional Option:**

* Everyone fills out a response card. Provide enough cards for everyone attending the service to have one (place at the end of the row or in each seat). After leading the “sinner’s prayer,” invite everyone present to fill out the information on the card. Collect the cards in whatever method seems best in your setting and thoroughly sort through the cards to identify those who need follow-up.

**Types of Evangelistic Invitations**

Dr. Roy Fish, Chair of Evangelism Emeritus, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, describes a variety of invitations that help people respond to the call of the gospel:

* **Invitation to come forward to openly confess Christ.** In many evangelistic churches, the standard invitation is one to come to the altar and accept Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior. This kind of invitation involves counsel and prayer with the pastor or decision encourager. This is the most commonly used invitation.
* **Invitation to go to an inquiry room for further guidance.** A second type of invitation, which has many advantages, is an invitation involving encouragers and a special room set aside for discussion of spiritual decisions. In this approach, people are invited to come forward and either stand at the altar or leave the area with an encourager during the invitation.
* **Invitation to sign a card.** A third option is an invitation for interested people to fill out a card. On the card is a statement of acceptance of Jesus Christ as Savior, a request for more information on how to become a Christian, and a request for a personal visit from a staff member, decision encourager, or member of the congregation, along with their personal information (i.e. name, address, email, phone, other contact information).
* **Invitation to raise one’s hand, look up, or stand.** This approach is generally used during a time when the music is playing and the congregation has closed their eyes in prayer. This provides a sense of privacy for the individual who does not want to be singled out in a room full of strangers. Encouragers should be alert and nearby to discreetly talk individually with those responding, gathering important data for follow-up.
* **Invitation to pray at one’s seat.** A fifth option calls for those who want to pray for salvation but do not know the words to use in their prayers. In this approach, the extender of the invitation asks the one(s) wishing to be saved to repeat his words as he leads him in a sinner’s prayer. This person should also point to encouragers in the room for personal prayer, information gathering and follow-up. A sample prayer is:

*Dear God, I know that Jesus is your Son and that He died on the cross and was raised from the dead. Because I have sinned and need forgiveness, I ask Jesus to come into my life. I am willing to change direction by acknowledging Him as my Lord and Savior, and by turning away from my sins. Thank you for giving me forgiveness, eternal life, and hope. In Jesus’ name, amen.*

Dr. Ron Herrod, President of the Conference of Southern Baptist Evangelists (COSBE), shares ten pointers for creating the right atmosphere for invitations:

* **The invitation should be given prayerfully.** Long before the evangelistic event, believers should be recruited to pray for the decisions that will be made. They should pray for the event, for the invitation giver, for lost people, for the decision encouragers, for the Lord to have His way in people’s hearts, and for Satan to be removed from that place of worship.
* **The purpose of the invitation should always be very clear.** Rehearse in advance exactly what you want to say on behalf of your Savior. “Drawing the net” should be concise, biblical, brief, communicated in the language of the audience, and unmistakably about Jesus Christ. Do not be a distraction to this holy moment. Take them to the cross!
* **Adequate guidance should always be available for those making decisions.** These decision encouragers should be trained, prepared, and organized to gather data. Pray and follow up with a person about his or her decision, regardless of the type of invitation you choose.
* **The length of the invitation should be determined with sensitivity and obedience to the Holy Spirit.** Be prepared with a strong invitation strategy, worked out in advance with the music team and counselors. Have soft music playing in the background. Be prepared to extend the invitation as God works in the lives of those in your audience.
* **Never forget that many of your hearers have religion without a living relationship with Jesus Christ.** Be an Andrew. Focus on taking them to the Master.
* **The invitation is not designed to create doubt about a previous genuine decision.** Do not be manipulative, abusive, or demanding. Be polite and positive. Exhibit tenderness, humility, kindness, and love in your extension of God’s amazing grace at the cross.
* **Give the invitation in a personal way.** In a concise, brief manner, tell them how you came to know Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior.
* **Be persuasive in your delivery.** You may never have their attention again. Lovingly remind them that this could be their only opportunity. Warn them about procrastination. Jesus always called for immediate action. Tell them to make this decision now!
* **Plan to preserve the invitation.** Make much of each decision. Make each decision very personal and approach it with enthusiasm and excitement. Make sure you have enough trained decision encouragers to talk with and follow up on each person. Remember, your goal is not decisions but disciples.