

SESSION 5

INVITE EVERYONE TO MORE

Introduction

Welcome to Session 5 of *Embracing Evangelism*. In this fifth session, we will explore Invite Everyone to MORE: how to be truly curious and open to the Spirit, and how to invite people to discover more with God. First, let us open with prayer. *Offer your own prayer here, or use one of the following:*

Lord Jesus Christ, you stretched out your arms of love on the hard wood of the cross that everyone might come within the reach of your saving embrace: So clothe us in your Spirit that we, reaching forth our hands in love, may bring those who do not know you to the knowledge and love of you; for the honor of your Name. Amen.

Loving God, as we come to this new session, help us to open our hearts and minds to what you would have us learn, as a group and as individuals. May we look to the life of Jesus for courage and wisdom as we begin to practice invitation. Fill us with boldness and joy as we follow the Holy Spirit's leading, inviting others to discover and share your goodness and love. Amen.

Begin the Video

Watch video from start to 22:12. Note these highlights for yourself:

- % **Pay attention.** Look and listen for the Holy Spirit's prompting, and look and listen for moments when it might seem as if someone wants to be invited. Then you can share an authentic, generous invitation appropriate to the moment. It should be based NOT on a formula or predetermined "good" outcome, but rather on whatever God is up to in that moment and on your genuine desire to celebrate that moment.
- &" **Be authentic.** Stay rooted in what makes your relationship with God in Christ unique. Stay tethered to that hope and joy, and share your invitation from that place. Remember that you're showing up with openness to whatever God wants to do in this person's life through you and your story.
- ' " **Be present.** Inviting does not have to be imposing. It's a ministry of presence. When we are in tune with others, we can offer a generous, non-imposing invitation. If someone says, "I lost my job and am so confused about where my life is going," don't respond with a generic invitation to church. Instead, share a story of how your faith has provided direction in your life. Share a scripture passage that helped you through a rough time or a book that God used to encourage you, or simply invite the person to walk or pray with you. Whatever being the loving presence of God with this person looks like, do that. Then wait for the Holy Spirit to open the door to MORE.
- (" **Use your words.** If you're being authentic and present – to God and to the person you are with – the words will come in time. In our Baptismal Covenant, we do not promise to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through perfect words and deeds. Instead, we make these promises as we are –awkward and a bit flawed – with God's help. In Luke 12:11-12, Jesus promises his followers: "Do not worry about how you are to defend yourselves or what you are to say; for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that very hour what you ought to say." Evangelism is about simultaneously showing up and getting out of God's way.

5. **Know your motivation.** There's a good chance that many people you know and encounter are lonely. Only about half of Americans have daily meaningful in-person social interactions. In England, there is a cabinet-level position – a Minister of Loneliness – to combat an “epidemic of loneliness.” When we invite people to MORE with God, then share our stories and invite theirs, and then celebrate God's loving presence in both, we help to remove the deep aloneness many of us experience. In Genesis 2:18, God says that it's not good for humans to be alone. Jesus lived, ministered, died, and rose again within the context of community. The truth is, human beings thrive when we are heard, wanted, and loved. Who doesn't want a life with more love, more connection, more liberation, more hope, more meaning? That life is possible with Jesus. Sharing about it might be the most powerful motivation for evangelism.
6. **Be brave.** Chances are you will experience rejection if you make an invitation. Some people don't want to connect with the Spirit or with faith. Or perhaps you will not be the one to unlock the door and draw them out. You can't force it, get attached to a particular outcome, or take the response personally. Create a hospitable space where people feel valued, heard, and held. Offer people the opportunity to taste and see for themselves the goodness of God. The rest is up to them and to God.
 - *If your group is doing the Exploratory Exercise: Watch until 22:12, which is the end of the explanation of the Exploratory Exercise. Pause the video and lead your group in the exercise and the post-exercise discussion.*
 - *If your group is not doing the Exploratory Exercise: Continue watching the video to witness the masterclass group as they try out the exercise.*

Exploratory Exercise: Invitation Matters

None of us just got here on our own. People have shared invitations that kept us walking through the many doors that led us to where we stand today. In this exercise, we're going to recall and share stories of when we were invited and why it mattered.

First, take a moment to think of a time when you received an invitation that made a difference in your life:

- What was the invitation?
- What was happening in your life during that season?
- Why did the invitation matter?
- Who made the invitation?
- What lasting effect has that invitation had on your life?

Does everyone have a story? Great – hang on to it. We will use principles from One-to-One StorySharing, but now in a group circle. The Beloved Community StorySharing Guidebook helps with StorySharing in a circle.

Review these guidelines with the group before beginning:

1. Listen deeply. Listen again. Then listen again.
2. Assume response-ability for yourself.
3. Speak only when it is your turn.
4. Give each person equal time.
5. Be a participant, not just an observer.
6. Get out of the information mindset and listen for feeling and experience.

7. Resist the temptation to use Prayer Book speak.
8. Never argue or debate another person's story.

I will review the prompts, and then we will begin with the person to my right and continue around the circle. When it is your turn, if you are not ready to share, you may simply say "pass." I will keep time for each person sharing. I will also repeat the prompt, as necessary, as the StorySharing continues.

If someone hesitates, remind the group that anyone may choose to pass and their turn will come around again. After everyone in the circle has had the opportunity to speak or pass, begin the rotation again for those who have passed.

StorySharing Prompt: Recall a moment when you received an invitation that made a difference in your life.

- What was the invitation?
- What was happening in your life during that season?
- Why did the invitation matter?
- Who made the invitation?
- What lasting effect has that invitation had on your life?

Share your answers to these questions in the circle.

Brief Discussion

Pose the following questions to the group:

- Why did that invitation work for you? *Possible responses might include the following:*
 - Sensitive to urging of Spirit and of this person's heart
 - Not attached to outcomes or getting people inside church
 - Not trying to convince or teach; instead, looking for opportunities to explore and build relationship
- What would NOT have worked?

Let's resume the video and see how the *Embracing Evangelism* participants did.

Resume the Video

Watch from 26:26 to 33:52. At that point, pause the video for discussion.

Discussion & Reflection Questions

Use the following reflection questions to guide your discussion. Depending on time, you might choose one or two on which to focus. Encourage participants to reflect on the remaining questions later themselves.

- Now that you have had a chance to reflect on an invitation that mattered, what would you say to the person who shared it with you?
- How did this exercise and conversation shift the way you view and approach invitation?

Finish the Video

Review the Try It Out section of the Participant Guide (see guide for more detailed instructions). Encourage participants to do the following before the next session:

- Create an Index Card Invitation, naming the invitation you most hope to offer and the person with whom you want to share that invitation.
- Pray to God, asking for a blessing on you and the person who rose to your heart.

Close with Prayer

In your own words, thank God for the gift of invitation and for the love that we are able to give and to receive when we accept God's invitation to draw nearer to the love and hope that Jesus brings. Thank God for the invitations in our lives that have made a difference. Pray for God's guidance and courage in offering invitations to others, asking for both the eyes to see the opportunity to invite and the words to offer. Close your prayer by thanking God that, through the gift of Jesus, we always are invited and welcomed at God's holy table.