Both/And: The Invitation and Challenge of Jesus
Balance by Chris Perrin

Do I lean more towards challenge or invitation?

Without a doubt, I am all about challenge. I thrive on it, crave it, collect it, and issue it. The best way to make me do something is to tell me I can’t. You do that and all you have to do is sit back and watch it get done.

In fact, until last week, I was so focused on challenge that I never realized how much Jesus used invitation. For me, the Gospels were one giant challenge. The sermon on the mount makes the Ten Commandments even more strict. If I want to follow Jesus, I have to take up my cross(es). If I am rich, access to Heaven is harder than fitting a camel through the eye of a needle. If I want a drink of living water, then I’m going to be talking about my past. Challenge, challenge, challenge... Fortunately, it’s challenge I used in my walk with God.

Then comes last week’s message. Apparently, even though I’m addicted to challenge, others aren’t. Others like my wife and son (the two most important people in my life), for whom I never stop creating challenges and setting higher standards, are not. Sadly, it has taken me this long to see they just do not respond to challenge the way I do and they certainly don’t always care for the way I issue challenge (even when I’m trying to be helpful.)

Even worse, I was blinded to our Lord’s ability to invite. Jesus asked twelve men and later hundreds to join him. He walked up to Zacchaeus, invited himself into the tax collector’s home, and changed his life. Jesus invited a dying thief to heaven even as he was suffering agony. Most importantly, though, Jesus invited us all to come home if only we would believe in him.

Yes, he was tough. Yes, he issued challenges, but along with those challenges was an invitation to receive his love, learn at his side and participate in the redemption of humanity.

What does this mean? Personally, it means that I have a lot of growing left to do, and maybe you do too. I, and those like me, need to learn how to invite just as others may need to learn to challenge. Neither task is going to be easy. Fortunately, we have a model to follow and pretty good evidence that doing both invitation and challenge can fundamentally change twelve disciples, then seventy-two disciples, and then hundreds (not to mention Christ-followers throughout history). With a track record like that, it means the combination of invitation and challenge is a powerful way to lead to growth. And that means it’s definitely worth giving a try.

"The goal is to build a church that is high in invitation and challenge. This produces leaders who are well placed to be fruitful and multiply the Kingdom into the lives of others.... They don’t settle for second best and will be significant contributors to the Kingdom of God."

~ Mike Breen and Alex Absalom
monday, 3.26
Read: Mark 6:30-44; Psalm 39:1-6

Study: Explore Jesus’ motives. Why does He ask the disciples to complete what seems to be an impossible task in feeding the thousands that day?

Personal: What is the seemingly impossible task before you today? This week? What is Jesus speaking to you about it?

tuesday, 3.27
Read: Mark 10:13-16; Psalm 39:7-13

Personal: Jesus challenges the disciples’ thinking about the Kingdom of God. What is Jesus invitation or challenge to you about the kingdom? Is he inviting you to take a step in by becoming child-like? Is he challenging you to shed some staunch, overly serious behavior? Do something today that makes you more like a child. Play outside, listen to a story, read a fun book!

wednesday, 3.28
Read: Matthew 11:20-28; Psalm 40:1-8

Study: Where do you see both invitation & challenge in Matthew 11?

Personal: In verse 28, Jesus promises a light burden; what heavy burden do you need to trade for His lighter one? Take time to pray and let the words in verse 28-30 be a meditation today.

thursday, 3.29
Read: Mark 8:1-10; Psalm 40:9-17
Study: This is the second time Jesus challenges the disciples to feed the thousands. He asks the same question he did the first time, “How much bread do you have?” What is Jesus hoping the disciples will do (this time around)?

Personal: We get second (and third and fourth and...so on) chances to take on the challenge of Jesus. What challenge is Jesus giving you a second chance to act on today?

Friday - Sunday, 3.30-4.01
Read: Mark 9:1-13; Psalm 41

Study: In this passage, Jesus invites three disciples to one of the most important moments He has with God the Father. What do you think is the result of this high level of invitation for Peter, James and John?

Personal: Take some time to listen to the high level of invitation that Jesus is giving you today. Make an “I will...” statement to respond to that invitation. Tell someone what you want to do as a result of what God spoke to you; that’s how we get accountable for our actions! Example: “I will...spend two hours on my day off this week inviting (like Jesus did with Peter, James and John) into my life people that God wants me to connect with.”

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