

The summer after I graduated from college, I was an Applebuddy. Anyone know what that means? Any other Applebuddies out there? Applebuddies are that rare, refined people who have at one point or another found gainful employment at the megachain neighborhood bar-and-grill Applebee's (logo + terms?). I was a fry cook, which means I spent 6-10 hours per shift standing over the deep fryers.

If you've worked in the restaurant business, you know there's a secret language. As a cook, I had to learn on the fly when to call out that I had "16 chicken fingers down all day!" (which meant I had 16 total chicken fingers in the deep fryers). I had to learn (quickly) to jump out of the way when someone yelled "Coming across hot!" because that meant they were walking down the narrow cook line with something that could burn us.

The servers had their own special language: we quickly learned to dread a 10- or 12-top: that was a single party of 10 or 12, all ordering at once. To take special care when preparing food for a "green table" because they were vegetarian. Servers lamented "squatters" - people who finished their food and didn't leave, keeping the server from getting more tipping clients, but they celebrated "whales" - someone who left a huge tip.

My first couple of weeks as an Applebuddy were dizzying, not just because I was thrown into the kitchen, but because I had to learn a whole new language to function as a part of the team. What's funny is that language isn't unique to Applebee's. It's restaurant lingo. When I meet other people who have worked in food service at some point, we can all talk the same lingo together, which is always good for a few laughs.

It's fun to be on the inside; it's intimidating to be on the outside.

The Church is too often the same: once you've been here for a while, you sort of learn to talk the lingo. Growing up in the Church, I noted all kinds of insider sayings: every time people went on a trip, we prayed for them to have "traveling mercies". When people were in trouble, we prayed for a "hedge of protection" around them. When I'd greet someone, ask how they are, they'd say, "Prayed up, paid up and ready to go up!" Then, we were leaving, they'd say, "See you here, there or in the air!" None of that's any weirder than my Applebuddy language, and I had to learn it basically the same way. Same goes with our theological language. Even if you don't exactly understand words like grace, redemption or sanctification, you figure it out close enough through context and know when to use them.

The Church is like every other institution in this regard: when groups of people get together, we naturally develop a common language different from other groups. And the longer you're a part of the group, the more the special language feels normal and natural.

The longer you're an insider, the less you remember what it feels like to be an outsider. [[how can we represent this pictorially?](#)]

That's important to remember as we move into our new vision. If you've been here this month, you know that Labor Day weekend marked this church community's 60th birthday. And as we've looked back at our past 60 years, we've dreamed about what the next 60 will hold. To move forward, we're casting a new vision that will guide our church for the next several years. We believe God is calling Beavercreek Church of the Nazarene to be a Church that connects and engages the unchurched in our neighborhoods.

We want to shift our focus away from ourselves to the 45,000 persons who live within 5 miles of our building who are not connected to any church. We want to become a church they would like to attend. That's an important definition: we don't know the spiritual condition of a person who is not part of a church. They may be close to God or far from God. That's not for us to judge. They may or may not feel "lost". That's between them and God. What we do know is they're not part of any faith community, and we'd love for them to join ours.

So a couple of weeks ago, our lead pastor Keven and youth pastor Jonathan talked about what it means to be the Church: that we must each take responsibility for our personal faith journeys, that each of us is called to become a picture of Jesus those around us can see.

Then last week, we explored what it means to connect with the unchurched: that far from evangelism programs and tracts, true connections with unchurched people look like friendship. No gimmicks. No strings attached. Just genuine, self-giving friendship. We love the unchurched people in our lives the way God loves us (and hopefully we love the church people in our lives that way too!) Connecting with unchurched people is really about breaking down the barriers we set up between us and them, church and unchurched people, to see we're all created and loved by God.

So today, I want to ask what it looks like to engage unchurched persons. As we form these sacred friendships with those who aren't part of a church, how do we engage them with the Good News about Jesus? Here's where we've been waiting for the other shoe to drop. You think: I knew it! I knew this "no strings attached" business was too good to be true. "Connect and engage" means "bait and switch!" Lure them in with friendship, then make the sales pitch!

But that's *still* not what we're doing. I understand the objection because I understand how it sounds. And most of us, whether we're insider or outsiders when it comes to Church, have experienced these sorts of Jesus sales pitches. So we think of "engaging someone with the Good News about Jesus" as basically an intellectual exercise: we have to convince the other person, which means we use arguments, logic, facts and figures.

The assumption behind that model is that someone has to think like we do before they can join us. They have to believe before they belong. [illustrate] It's an **intellectual model** of humanity, one that says the only thing that really matters is what you think. So, if you're not a theological genius, you feel inadequate. You don't know enough to have compelling arguments. You can't tease out the difference between imputed and imparted righteousness, or explain the difference between crisis and process when it comes to salvation and sanctification.

Cue the panic attacks.

The good news is that Intellectual Model of engaging people with the Good News about Jesus isn't the dominant model we find in the Scriptures. Oh it's there, in a few places, but, like you'd expect, it's mainly from the crazy smart guys like the Apostle Paul. The average people, those who don't have the advanced schooling, do something very different: something we can call the Invitational Model.

And the Invitational Model is exactly as easy as it sounds. We engage unchurched persons with the Good News about Jesus by extending a hand and saying, Come and see!

Nowhere is this more clear than in how Jesus calls his own followers. If you have a Bible, turn with me to John 1. If you grabbed one of our Bibles on the way in, it's on page XXXX. If you don't own a bible, please keep that one as a gift from us!

Now, since we're in chapter 1, we're obviously at the beginning of the story. And because John has told us Jesus is God, we know who he really is. But none of the other people in the story have a clue. As far as they know, he's just another guy walking around. He shows up where his cousin John (not the author; another John) is baptizing people. He's announcing that God is coming, that this new thing everyone's been waiting for is almost here. John has built up a pretty good following of people, guys who're anxious to see what God is going to do.

Our story picks up in v35. Let's read together,

The following day John was again standing with two of his disciples. As Jesus walked by, John looked at him and declared, “Look! There is the Lamb of God!” When John’s two disciples heard this, they followed Jesus. Jesus looked around and saw them following. “What do you want?” he asked them.

They replied, “Rabbi” (which means “Teacher”), “where are you staying?”

“Come and see,” he said. It was about four o’clock in the afternoon when they went with him to the place where he was staying, and they remained with him the rest of the day.

First, John points out Jesus and says, That's the guy you've all been waiting for! And because they trust John, they go bug Jesus. They ask to follow him, and Jesus invites them: Come and see.

So they just go.

Some of our relationships look like this: we have built a lot of relational credibility with some people. They know we love them, that we want the best for them. And when Jesus becomes evident in their lives, we point him out, and Jesus takes it from there. This is how I chose to follow Jesus. I was surrounded by people who loved me - especially my parents, my teachers at church. They pointed out Jesus working in my life, calling me into a relationship with him, and for me to say Yes was a no-brainer.

And for those of us whose relationship with God looks like this, extending the same invitation feels very natural. Look at what the two men do next:

Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, was one of these men who heard what John said and then followed Jesus. Andrew went to find his brother, Simon, and told him, “We have found the Messiah” (which means “Christ”).

Then Andrew brought Simon to meet Jesus. Looking intently at Simon, Jesus said, “Your name is Simon, son of John—but you will be called Cephas” (which means “Peter”*)).

One of the two, Andrew, has a brother named Simon. He goes to him and says, We found him! So Andrew brings Simon to meet Jesus. Jesus sizes Simon up and lets him know he's in the way men have made each other feel welcomed and accepted since the beginning of time: He gives Simon a nickname. Jesus takes a long look at Simon and says, I'm going to call you Rocky (which is what Peter means in Greek, and Cephas in Hebrew).

Peter's experience with Jesus was similar to Andrew's: curiosity rewarded with welcome. His willingness to give Jesus a chance was based on his relationship to Andrew. And all Andrew had to say was, I found what you've been looking for! Come meet him!

For some of us in here, that's how it worked for you, too. But that's not how it works for everyone. Some of us are more skeptical. We need more than just welcome. Let's hear the other guy's story:

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Come, follow me.” Philip was from Bethsaida, Andrew and Peter’s hometown.

So far so good. Before he rolls out of town, Jesus tracks down Philip, the other guy who'd hung out with him, and invites him along. But before he leaves, Philip wants to invite his friend:

Philip went to look for Nathanael and told him, “We have found the very person Moses and the prophets wrote about! His name is Jesus, the son of Joseph from Nazareth.”

“Nazareth!” exclaimed Nathanael. “Can anything good come from Nazareth?”

“Come and see for yourself,” Philip replied.

This is what everyone who wants to talk about Jesus is afraid of: Philip makes the big ask, and he's met with skepticism. Nazareth in Jesus' day was a backwoods, hillbilly town where nothing good or important ever happened. So when Philip claims that the person on whom the whole history and future of the universe hinges is a guy from Nazareth, Nathaniel is understandably skeptical.

It'd be like claiming today that the savior of the world was from some little town in Alabama or Mississippi. Or you know, anywhere in Michigan (I'm sorry Michiganders! That's too easy in Buckeye country!! I shouldn't go for the low-hanging fruit!).

But notice that Philip doesn't argue or anything. He just says, Come and See.

This is hugely important: most of us think that in order to talk about what Jesus is doing in our lives, we have to have PhDs in theology or something. That we have to have all the questions answered, all the talking points in order, all the objections accounted for.

But Christianity is not first and foremost a set of beliefs. Christianity is a whole-life transformation, an intentional relationship with the God who created us and loves us. So you don't Inform. You Invite.

Which is exactly what Jesus did: come and see!

What Andrew did. Simon, Come and see!

Exactly what Philip did. Nathaniel, Come and see. And what happened?

As they approached, Jesus said, “Now here is a genuine son of Israel—a man of complete integrity.”

“How do you know about me?” Nathanael asked.

Jesus replied, “I could see you under the fig tree before Philip found you.”

Then Nathanael exclaimed, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God—the King of Israel!” -- John 1:35-49

If this isn't the strangest coda to the story, I'm not sure what would qualify. But this exemplifies precisely why the Come and See, Invitational model is *the* preferred way to engage those far from God with the good news about Jesus.

If you had given Philip a thousand guesses, would he have known to mention Nathaniel hanging out under a fig tree?

A million guesses?

No way! Because *what does that even mean?*!

I have no idea. You have no idea. Philip had no idea.

You know who knew? Jesus. And Nathaniel.

Nathaniel's skepticism was overcome not with astute arguments and powerful propositions.

He had a real, personal and intimate encounter with Jesus that demonstrated that this was in fact who he had been waiting for. Even though he was from Michigan (I mean Nazareth).

Some of you think that's way too easy, that it's a copout to say you don't have to argue with someone or know all the answers to be able to share Jesus. That all it takes is a Come and See invitation.

But it's actually a lot harder than the informational model. Because Jesus isn't walking around over in Xenia or something. When you invite someone to "come and see", you're inviting them not to come meet a person who can shake their hand, but more fully into a relationship with you.

Because - as we've seen throughout this series - we are the picture of Jesus for the world. Us, here, the Church. Those of us who know that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. Those of us who've said Yes to his invitation. We are the picture of God for the world around us.

So when we're inviting people to "Come and See", we're inviting them into our lives, and into our church.

This is why our vision begins with "Be the Church". We put formation first. We want to become faithful pictures of Jesus. And *that* is what we should invite people to Come and See: how God is continually transforming our lives. And that's how the Come and See model engages the unchurched with the Good News about Jesus. Not with carefully crafted arguments and impressive rhetoric. But by allowing them to see God's power at work in your life.

It's not Come and Listen. It's come and *see*.

So you invited these friends to share your life - because that's what friends do. And when you have a relationship with God, when you are being formed into a picture of Jesus, then everything you do announces the Good News about Jesus: how you share a meal, how you forgive, how you love.

But you're not doing this alone. Since we started EPIC, we've wanted it to be a worship experience that is meaningful, exciting and inspiring to those who are unchurched. Not because we water anything down or hide our convictions, but because we are celebrating the Good News about Jesus in language those who aren't insiders understand. Just as God became one of us, spoke our language, so we want our celebrations here to

In short, we're going to continue to do everything we can think of to make this space, this time, a place you are excited to share with your unchurched friends. We want you to be confident that your friend who is unchurched would love it here just like you love it here. Not because we're baiting and switching, but because we're honestly and earnestly celebrating what God is doing in our lives.

We want the 45,000 to belong whether or not they believe because we are convinced that God's love is so big, so amazing that when they experience it, they'll want it. We know the Good News about Jesus is so much better than anything else that as long as they can understand it, the unchurched will want to be part of this church. Who wouldn't!?

We want to become a whole church that's so focused on the 45,000 they transform all we do. Just like God did for us, we will go among them, enter their worlds and offer friendship. Invite them into relationships where God's transforming, rescuing power is on display. Our lives become an invitation they can understand.

Examine:

So again:

1. What relationship is God calling you to be more present in?
2. What is your next right step in that relationship?