

How to Make Sure Nothing Ever Changes

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[0 : 00] Hello, Table Church. My name is Anthony Parrott, and I'm the lead pastor here, and we're going to dig into God's Word today. We are going to start a new series looking at some stories of the life of Jesus and how he interacted with people that liked him, people that didn't like him, and we're going to learn how we can do the same thing, interact with people who do or don't like us, and how we can change the world through our relationships.

But before we do that, we're going to take a look at some examples of passive aggressiveness on the internet, because today's sermon is brought to you by BuzzFeed. Here's one of somebody, this is not me, it probably could be, somebody who posted the Wi-Fi available in their neighborhood. It says, one of my neighbors is taking passive aggressive to a new level. Shut your kids up, is what Wi-Fi is named. Here's another one. This passive aggressive bridal store is doing personal violence to me.

About time bridal. Here's another one. Technology has brought so many amazing things to our lives, like passive aggressive push alerts. My fitness pal saying, these reminders don't seem helpful.

We'll stop them so they don't bother you. This has happened to me. I have stymied every fitness app on my phone at its attempt to get me to be more active. Here's the perfect passive aggressive Christmas present, the unexpected joy of the ordinary, and celebration of being average.

[1 : 26] Probably a good book, but if someone gives this to you as a gift, you just throw it back. Here's a real life example from a prayer request sheet from a church I was a worship leader at.

It says, please pray that Anthony will tone down the music. People around us were all saying it was too loud. There is no better form of passive aggressiveness than the famous people were saying quote for pastors.

And here's one of my favorite backhanded compliments of all time. I was told this after a sermon. Not here, different church. That's the only good sermon I've ever heard here.

Which I go, thanks. Wait a second. So why are we passive aggressive? Why do we behave in these passive aggressive ways? I think there are a couple reasons.

One, we want to see something change. We want to see something be different, but we don't have the relationship with the person that we want to have, or that we could have, or that we should have. And so we're trying to bring about change, but with a lack of relationship.

[2 : 29] Or we are afraid of outright conflict. We're afraid of what people might think of us. We're afraid of what the argument might happen if we actually bring this up to someone's face. And so we try to skirt around it.

We try to get around actual conversation, actually talking to somebody about the thing that's wrong. And so we find passive aggressive ways to do it. Some of us aren't passive aggressive.

Some of us are just aggressive aggressive. You might be one of those people. You might know someone like that, that they are just in your face all the time, and they don't really care all that much about your feelings.

You need to know what they need to tell you. And some of us are just passive, I guess, if that's okay. I hope that you don't get mad at me for saying that. Some of us, we aren't passive aggressive. We'll never speak our mind. We won't even find ways to skirt around what we're trying to do, the change that we're trying to make. And so we just kind of let life happen to us. And sometimes we can feel like victims or survivors of life because we're passive.

[3 : 31] We don't do anything about it. Now, we are people who naturally, we should, we want things to change, and we're just not sure how. Talking to you all, you are all folks who want to see the world change.

I believe that God has placed within us the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is a world-shaping, world-changing force living within us. And the Holy Spirit wants us to change the world for the better.

Christians believe in this prayer that Jesus said that we want to see God's kingdom come, God's will being done on earth as it is in heaven. And so when we see injustice, when we see problems, when we see pain, when we see suffering, when we see things that just could be better, we want it to change.

But we're not always sure how. And we get conflicting messages about how to change the world and how to change our relationships and how to change society and systemic racism and all of the problems in the world.

We get conflicting messages about how to do this. We'll get told, stand up for yourself, but be nice about it, please. Hey, you need to speak up and stand out and be weird. But geez, you don't have to be such a B word about it.

[4 : 44] How many of you have heard that? Hey, you need to stand up for what you believe in. But please, don't push your beliefs onto me. We get these conflicting messages about needing to change the world, needing to be aggressive about it, but also, but, you know, be nice, be kind.

Don't be too loud. Don't stand up for yourself. Don't be a jerk. And so we get confused. We don't know how to do it. Or we pick one or the other. We pick permanently nice, but that doesn't actually change anything.

Or we pick permanently aggressive and we lose out on relationship with people. Now, I don't know if you noticed, but we're in this massive national conversation about things needing to change, about racism and systems of oppression.

And if you flip open Instagram or Facebook or TikTok or Reddit, you might notice a post or two about it. And you also may be entering into some of those really difficult conversations right now. You're committed to the work of anti-racism as you should be. And so you're trying to bring it up in conversation. You're talking to the family members and the friends in your life that you feel like, man, we need to talk about this.

[5 : 53] We need to own up to our racist and prejudiced tendencies. Or we need to talk about the pain that we've experienced because of racism. And you're having these conversations and it's hard and you don't know how.

And while we're having these hard conversations, we're probably, at least occasionally, acting in passive-aggressive ways. Maybe just aggressive-aggressive. Maybe just passive. Maybe a mix of the two.

We throw things out on the social media. I've done plenty of this and we hope it makes a difference. And some of it's passive. Hey, I don't know if I agree with everything, but maybe you should check this out.

Some of it's aggressive. If you don't agree, you're a Nazi and we can't be friends anymore. And some of it's passive-aggressive. Like, hey, I'm not saying that you need to watch this, but I'm not saying you don't need to watch this.

And we are talking about more than just racism. We're talking about policing and education and housing. And we have daily conversations about where you want to go to eat or order in for food.

[6 : 53] And we have conversations about inviting someone to church or not. We have conversations about wearing a mask or not, staying socially distant or not. Is COVID real or a hoax? We have conversations about the things in our job and the things in our family and the things in our friend group.

It goes on and on and on and on. Jesus dealt with this. So if you have a Bible, I invite you to turn it on, power it up, flip it open.

I'm going to go to the book of Luke chapter 4, verses 16 through 30. The words are not going to be on the screen because I want to encourage you to actually pick up and open up a Bible.

So if you don't know where the book of Luke is, there's a table of contents in the front. There's no shame in using that. You can find the book of Luke. Go to the fourth chapter and then we'll read this together.

Bam! And now with movie magic, there's a Bible in my hand. If only were that always that easy. Here is what Luke chapter 4 says. It starts in verse 16. Jesus went to Nazareth where he had been brought up and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue as was his custom.

[8 : 02] He stood up to read and the scroll of prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it was written. So we'll pause there. Now Jesus, he has been baptized. He's been in the wilderness for 40 days.

He's been tempted. He has now gone back to Galilee and he started his public ministry, which you can actually read about a couple verses above. He started his public ministry and he's beginning to be a rabbi, a traveling rabbi of some renown and some fame.

And what Jesus did in the early part of his ministry is he would just go from synagogue to synagogue, Jewish learning place to learning place, and he would read the scriptures and he would teach on them. And so now Jesus has gone back to his hometown.

And I don't know about you, but sometimes when you go back to your hometown, emotions can get a little high. So Jesus goes back to his hometown and he's going to do the thing that he's been doing.

He's going to preach from the Hebrew scriptures, particularly from the book of Isaiah. And this is what Jesus says. This is verse 18. He's quoting the prophet Isaiah. The spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to listen to this message, proclaim good news to the poor.

[9 : 05] That's good. He sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners. Great. Recovery of sight for the blind. Awesome. To set the oppressed free. To proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. Then Jesus rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down.

And don't picture that Jesus like went back to the pews and sat down. Jesus sat down in the chair of teaching. Sitting was a position of authority. And so Jesus was now going to deliver the message. So Jesus sat down.

The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. And it began by saying to them, Today, today, this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing. Holy smokes, Jesus.

What are you saying? Okay, now listen to the response. And this is what it says, verse 22. It says, Now, I think there's a little bit of over-translating here that the NIV does.

It says, All spoke well of him. Greek word is where we get the word martyr. It's a word for testify or testimony or to speak, to speak up. And so the crowd, we don't know if they're speaking well of him.

[10 : 12] And I would argue they're probably not. They're talking about Jesus. And they're amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. They're amazed because what Jesus just said is nonsense. The Jewish people were currently under Roman Empire oppression.

And they had a puppet king. They would be routinely killed, martyred, crucified, slaughtered for some of their beliefs. Or just because the Romans were feeling a little bit bored.

Whenever there was some sort of insurrection, the Roman army would come in and kill a bunch of people. And so for Jesus to say, like, Hey, good news.

Freedom for the prisoners. Crest free. You're the Lord's favor. This is happening today. I don't think the people are speaking well of Jesus. I think they're saying, Wait, isn't this Joseph's son? Aren't you the construction workers, boy?

Who on earth do you think you are, Jesus? Jesus was the construction worker. The Greek word is technon. It means a builder. Oftentimes we think of Jesus as a carpenter. For those who have been to Israel, Palestine, that area, you know, there's not a lot of trees.

[11 : 15] It's a lot of rock. And so Jesus probably was like a stonemason. He would go around in his early life and he would build buildings for, you know, people and for the empire.

He was a construction worker. And so the crowd hears this message from Jesus and says, like, You're the construction worker's kid. What on earth are you talking about? Verse 22.

Sorry, verse 23. Jesus said to them, Surely, you're going to quote this proverb to me, Physician, heal yourself. In other words, prove it. And you'll tell me, Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.

Jesus' kind of base of operation was a town up the road called Capernaum. That's where Peter and Andrew and some of the other disciples lived. And that's where Jesus has done a lot of his early ministry in Capernaum.

And so he's assuming that his family, friends, his hometown boys are all going to be like, Hey, we heard about these stories. Prove it. And Jesus continues, verse 24. Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in his hometown.

[12 : 19] I assure you that there will be many widows in Israel in Elijah's time, or there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years, and there was a

severe famine throughout the land. Yet, Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon.

So what Jesus is saying, like, Hey, when Elijah was around, Elijah's ministry wasn't just to Jews. It was to Gentiles as well. It wasn't just the inside crowd. It was the outside crowd. Verse 27.

There were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet. Another Old Testament story. Yet none of them was cleansed, it was only Naaman the Syrian. It wasn't the inside crowd that got the healing.

It was the outside crowd. Now listen to the crowd's response. Verse 28. All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. They got up, drove Jesus out of town, took him to the brow of a hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him off a cliff.

But Jesus, being Jesus, walked right through the crowd and went on his way. All right. So, there are two concepts, two things that Jesus continually calibrated in his ministry, that he always had both operating at the same time.

[13:34] Sometimes one to a higher degree or one to a higher degree. But he always had them operating at the same time. And I think this passage shows us these two principles. The first principle is that of invitation.

Invitation is a mindset or a skill that says, I'm glad you're here. I'm committed to you. And I will welcome you no matter what. An invitation can be done in an interpersonal way.

I can say that to my friend or my family or my coworkers. It can also be done in like an operational or organizational way. You can have a church, a small group, a company that's highly invitational. It's about people feeling connected, interconnected, involved, cared for. So, there's invitation. And there's also challenge. And challenge is the skill or the mindset that says, I want you to grow. I'm committed to your growth. And I care too much about you to let things stay the same. So, again, this can be interpersonal relationships. I'm committed to your growth. I want you to grow.

[14:32] And there's a sense of mutuality there. You've consented to that kind of challenge. This can also happen at an operational, organizational, church level. Things can be high challenge. We are not content with where we're at.

We are going to go new places and break new ground. And we're going to see growth and change. Okay? So, invitation and challenge. Now, you can put these two concepts on a matrix.

So, in front of you, you should have like a vertical bar and a horizontal bar. Sorry if anyone's having nightmares about, you know, plotting graphs and algebra. A vertical bar is high invitation, low invitation.

And the horizontal bar is high challenge, low challenge. And you can, people, I believe, tend to be either one of two things.

They trend towards in stress or in their most natural state, they trend towards one of two things. They can be high invitation and low challenge. So, at their best, they're offering care and comfort and healing.

[15:32] But at their worst, when you're only high invitation and you're never bringing any challenge, that can lead to lethargy and stagnation. It can lead to an insular group. It can lead to a sense of entitlement or coziness that never breaks out of its shell.

You can also be high challenge and low invitation. And again, at its best, you can bring growth and change and correction. Things can get better.

But when it stays high challenge, low invitation all the time, this can bring stress, discouragement, exhaustion, fear, manipulation. Me, I am most naturally a high challenge, low invitation person.

I often use the example of how I write my emails. When I write an email, I write out the challenge stuff. This is what needs to happen. This is what needs to be done. And then I go back to the top of the email and I add the invitation.

Hey, good morning. I hope you're having a great day. I hope you're staying safe and healthy. I love you so much. Bye. That's just most naturally where I'm at. I have to consciously think about bringing that invitation.

[16:34] I most naturally bring the challenge. Now, Jesus perfectly calibrated at all times invitation and challenge. And when you have a relationship like that, a church like that, a small group like that, an organization like that, that brings a culture and an environment of empowerment, innovation, opportunity, and what I think is discipleship.

Discipleship is a relationship of both invitation and challenge. And that's where healthy growth change. It's not based in shame or embarrassment, but based in love and a desire to see people grow.

So what's going on and how is the crowd responding to Jesus? Jesus brings both a high invitation and a high challenge message. High invitation. Jesus is proclaiming the year of the Lord's favor. Good news to the poor. Where there is sickness, he's bringing healing. All of these good things. Jesus is bringing high invitation. And what does the crowd do? The synagogue hears this message of high invitation.

And their response is, aren't you the construction workers, kid? Who, who, who the heck do you think you are? Why are you talking about this wonderful year of the Lord's favor? Have you not noticed the Romans are still here?

[17:49] Dude, shut up. But Jesus continues. He also brings the high challenge. And Jesus says, this is for the outsider. Like, it's not just the inside group that's going to experience all of these things.

It's for everyone. God's intention of shalom, wholeness, healing, restoration is for the entire world. Not just those who think that they're on the inside, but also for those on the outside.

Jesus is breaking down the barrier of in and out and saying, you're all in. And how does the crowd respond to that? Their response is, throw them off a cliff.

So here is a group of people that are both low challenge and low invitation. Jesus calibrates correctly. He brings the invitation. He brings the challenge. He talks about the year of the Lord's favor.

And he talks about how the dividing wall is going to be broken down. This is for the everybody, both the insider and the outsider. And the crowd is saying, no, we reject that.

[18:50] Now, if you were to Google images of invitation and challenge on a Google image search, you would see this section, this bottom left quadrant, often called a section of boredom and apathy.

And you can Google this. You can find lots of articles online. I did not invent this. It comes from a gentleman named Mike Breen who runs a discipleship organization called 3DM. And I've used it for years and adapted it in lots of different ways.

So yeah, you'd call this boredom and apathy. But I think what the crowd shows is that low invitation and low challenge is not just boredom and apathy. And actually can be cooperating with evil.

They want to throw the son of God off a cliff. Now, they don't know he's the son of God at this point. But they hear this message of high invitation and high challenge. God is showing up. He's doing something new. Everybody's invited.

And their low challenge, low invitation response is, let's kill the guy. Maintaining the status quo because we either don't want to offend, that's our passive side, or we don't want to reach out to the other side, that's our aggressive side, is actually a way of cooperating with the forces of evil.

[19:56] The forces of evil don't just do bad things. Forces of evil also stop good things from happening. Real lasting change requires both invitation and challenge.

Avoiding either one or both isn't free. It comes at a cost. We may get out of some emotional connection because we don't want to be invitational. Or we may get out of some emotional conflict because we don't want to bring the challenge.

But that comes at the cost of things forever staying the same. And when we pray, I will be done on earth as it is in heaven, your kingdom come, that means we don't want to see things stay the same. We're not content with the status quo. So, that's what we're going to be talking about over the next three weeks. How we calibrate invitation and challenge. How the Holy Spirit is working within us to be world changers, kingdom bringers.

So, next week, we're going to talk about how to make friends, the high invitation part. Talk about Jesus' relationship with the disciple Peter. Two weeks, Pastor Angela is going to talk about how to make the right kind of trouble, which is the high challenge side of things.

[21:05] And then in three weeks, we're going to talk about how to change the world. When we calibrate both invitation and challenge, we become world changers. So, how I want to end today is offering you both an invitation and a challenge.

The invitation is this. When you read Jesus' words here in Luke chapter 4, I want you to read it over your own life. Imagine that Jesus was saying to you this good news.

The Spirit of the Lord has anointed me, Jesus says, to proclaim good news to you. The Spirit has sent me to proclaim freedom to you, recovery of what was lost to you, to set you free, to proclaim God's favor over you.

So, that's my invitation. Read this over your life. And my challenge is this. When you read Jesus' proclamation, who do you want to leave out? How do you feel about the fact that Jesus' message is even for those that you want to exclude?

So, read it like this. The Spirit of the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to your enemies. The Spirit has sent me to proclaim freedom for those you think belong in jail, recovery of what was lost to those you think should lose everything, to set those you despise free, to proclaim God's favor over everyone that you dislike.

[22 : 27] How does that settle within you as you hear that? What emotions does it bring up? Is God really that reckless? Is God really that good? Is God really that bad? Wrestle with that.

That's my challenge for you this week. Let's pray. Jesus, I thank you that you are the God of invitation and challenge, that you love us precisely where we are, and you love us too much to leave us there.

So, Jesus, God, I ask that your Spirit, living and abiding within us, would form us and shape us to be the kinds of people who are invitational and challenging, that we love people where they're at, that we are relational, we make friends, we reach out to our neighbors, that we love people and we will stay committed to them, and that we are committed to seeing this world reflect your reign, your will, your way.

And that will require hard conversations and a few posts on social media, a lot of prayer, a lot of talk, and a lot of wrestling and struggling together to see your kingdom come.

Help us, God, we pray these things in the unity of the Spirit and in the name of Jesus. Amen.