

The Public and the Personal

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- [0 : 00] We spent the last few weeks in a series called Don't Be a Jerk. And we've been interrogating and looking at this invitation challenge matrix.
- Talking about how to create holy trouble, how to be kind, how to be high invitation where we make space and are welcoming people and creating and encouraging friendships.
- And also how to be high challenge where we're calling people to accountability and challenging them to life change. We saw Jesus doing this, calling out Pharisees when they were operating and participating in and perpetuating unjust systems.
- We saw this in the Sermon on the Mount where he invited people to a new way of seeing scripture, a new way of living. And we saw this as he met with Zacchaeus, inviting him to dinner and then challenging him to fundamentally change the nature of his life.
- Jesus modeled invitation and challenge in everything. We saw that as he invited people to come and see what he was doing, how he invited people to be with him, inviting the children, inviting people around to spend time with him.
- [1 : 17] And then he switched from invitation to challenge where he invited people to follow him, to take up their cross. And this invitation being transformed into challenge.
- And then he said, be like me. Be little Christs in this world. Taking people from inspiration to transformation. And now we're going to be embarking on a sermon series that looks at why we gather and the importance of our getting together and what that looks like and how.
- And again, we're going to be building on what we've already talked about but moving forward with a specific purpose. Especially right now, given our distance, we have a chance to kind of examine why we do what we do.
- And I, in the middle of this, want to just acknowledge the fact that in some ways this is kind of painful. It's painful for us to discuss right now. You know, somebody like me who's a very big extrovert who doesn't have a lot of interaction with people right now, some things super energize me.
- So this Friday, last Friday, some friends of ours projected Hamilton on the wall of the building next to the house. And about 10 of us gathered in the parking lot, social distancing, all with masks on, no touching.
- [2 : 38] But we were able to interact, watch Hamilton together and process it some together. I got home about 1 in the morning, which is, you know, fine. But I couldn't sleep until about 4.30 because as an extrovert, I got so charged up and energized by just being around people and interacting.
- So I understand that in some ways it's really painful to think about what it looks like to live in community together and where we meet and how we meet when right now we can't even meet.
- But we're doing this because we want to look forward to what we want to build as we come out of this and also to the kind of spaces that we want to build in virtual space so that we can be healthy, thriving, growing disciples in this time.

When I was a couple decades ago and I was working as a youth and worship arts pastor at a church, we went to a missional emerging church conference.

And there there was a sociologist that talked to us a little bit about what it is to have healthy people. And he introduced us to this topic called proxemics, which is the idea and the study of the way and the space between people, the relational space between people on a daily basis.

[4 : 02] And so he talked to us about the four different relational spaces, the public, the social, the personal and the transparent. He kind of defined it as this, the public is like a setting where you are with a bunch of people who you don't know, but you're having a shared experience.

For example, I went to a Muse concert once and I really loved it. But because I bought my ticket at a different time that my friends bought their tickets, we were on different sides of the big stadium.

So 20,000 people are there rocking down to Muse and I'm experiencing this by myself. But there was this moment when Chris Wolstenholme, the bassist, just kind of like cracked his neck, he shook his hand out and he took two steps forward.

And I was like, oh my gosh, I know what's going to happen right now. They're going to play hysteria. And I was so excited. And I looked over and the person sitting next to me who I've never met before was also like, and then the opening notes of the bassist happened and we just went through the roof, right?

We were so excited. We just shared a public moment. It was a shared experience with somebody we're never going to see again. We're never going to even sit down and talk and process that. But we had a moment that was the same.

[5 : 15] Social spaces are more like big parties. It's like your work colleagues where you're sitting around on a Zoom call waiting for your boss to come in and your work colleague goes, oh my gosh, I'm so tired because I didn't get to sleep to 4.30 a.m. last night because Hamilton and people and somebody else is like, oh my gosh, I saw Hamilton this weekend too.

And then you start talking and sharing these stories, vignettes, bits of your life with one another, but you're not like super intimate and super close. You're not getting really intimate with details that not many people know, but instead you're sharing little bits of your life with one another.

That's social. It's little snapshots of your life. And then there's the personal space. Personal is like at a bar with your friends or around the table having a meeting or a meal together.

It's where you're honest and you can be vulnerable. It's where you make people feel at home, where you have friends. They carry some of your history. They know some of your stories and your struggles.

It's where you can challenge one another because you are doing life together. And then there's transparency. Transparent is like naked and laid bare. It's intimate.

[6 : 27] It's the relationship you have with a very, very, very close best friend or your spouse. It's a really close relationship with the person who knows you best. And when I was in this session, the sociologist talked about how healthy people, if you study them, they have relationships across all those four spheres.

And kind of the ratio is for every one transparent relationship, you have two personal relationships, to four social relationships, to eight public relationships.

Like there is a real importance to having a balance across all those spheres. So when we look at proxemics and we look at all those spheres, we realize they're also super important for discipleship as well.

We see Jesus in each one of these spaces. And to be quite honest, I think it'd be really fun to go back through the gospels and just kind of mark out like, this is Jesus in the public spaces. This is Jesus in the social spaces.

This is Jesus in the personal. This is Jesus in the transparent. Like I think it'd be interesting because I'm just a big giant nerd, but we all knew that, right? But if you watch, like Jesus did these public things.

[7 : 38] He fed 5,000 people. He would teach large crowds of people. None of those was a really super personal experience, but instead it was something shared with a large amount of people.

And then he had social engagements like social encounters where it was a small group of people where there's more interaction. He shared a wedding with friends and family and disciples. He had 120 that worked with him that he sent out at different times.

And then there were those personal places where Jesus had his 12 disciples, where he was having a more deep relationship with him, where he worked with them to help shape them into being the leaders that could take over when he left.

And then he had the transparent relationships. Peter, James, and John, the ones that went just a little bit further with him, the ones that were deeper. He also added a layer, which I think is really important for discipleship, the divine, where he would go off and spend time with God this way.

So another sphere of healthy relationships, the one with our creator. Jesus went back and forth in each of these spaces and he needed all of them in his ministry.

[8 : 49] One wasn't necessarily prioritized over another. They all had their place. And he created a rhythm between the public and social spaces and the personal and transparent aspects of his ministry.

A holy tension between what was like high invitation, where he taught, he healed, he said, let the children come to me.

And the high confrontation kind of areas, that Peter, who do you say that I am? James and John, do you understand what you're asking for? And if you want to be at my right hand, where he invites people to take up their cross and follow him.

And this rhythm is mimicked also in the early church, where we see in Acts 2 a description of what happens both in the larger setting and in the smaller setting among the believers.

I'm going to read that to us now. Acts 2, 42 to 47. It says, Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts.

[10 : 18] They broke bread in homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

As we read this, we see in this first iteration of Christ followers that there are things that exist in both spaces, the larger and the smaller, but there are some things that are specific about each.

Let's break it down just a little bit and look. In the temple, they had teaching and fellowship. And so teaching, obviously, is devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching, listening to people talking about Jesus and life in this new way that Jesus had set out for us.

And then fellowship is a Greek word called *koinonia*. Probably you've heard that before if you've been around church circles for a long time. I certainly have heard it a lot. It's a word that's translated a couple different similar ways that give us all a little bit of facet onto the meaning of what this word means.

Sometimes it's translated fellowship. Sometimes it's translated sharing. Sometimes participation. Sometimes contribution. It creates this idea that within community and communion, there's a joint participation, a sharing and an intimacy that we are together.

[11 : 38] Fellowship. The apostles also teach. And then there is the breaking of bread and prayer. And with each of these, there's a sort of definite article that comes in front of them, which suggests that it's not just a, hey, we're breaking bread and whatever, but that it's a ritual or an established pattern attached to it.

That it is likely the Eucharist, the breaking of bread and doing this in the remembrance of Christ and his sacrifice. And then spending time in prayer, but because again, that definite article the V in front of it suggests that this was maybe like a ritual or a set pattern or a liturgy of prayers and worship, that it was created around something that was corporate and together that everyone was doing.

But then you go from house to house and you see still some of the same things. There's still breaking bread, which suggests that probably communion happened in these settings. But it also shows that the apostles and the people and the believers were eating together.

We're spending time in each other's company, a different facet of fellowship. They had, and in this setting, they talk about the heart and the attitude of the people that were there and the way they praised God together.

I'm just going to put a pin in this. Like there are a number of words across scripture that are translated worship and praise. So many different ones. One of my favorite is this one called Halal. Halal. And it's often, Halal is often, it's seen in a number of different places.

[13 : 08] One of the places is where it says, there's a word, the verse is translated, the Lord delights over us with singing. And the picture created by this word is sort of like a joyfully clamorous or a clamorously foolish moment.

When I think back of my times in small groups, some of the best, most beautiful times are when we were abandoned and full of just joy and being clamorously foolish, both in the way we interact, interact with each other, but in the way that we worship the Lord.

So I just wanted to put that plug in there. There's room for that. It doesn't always have to be somber when you're worshipping. But also in this, from house to house, there was a mention of how people perceived them.

Their reputation was good. They had favor with all the people around them. So we see in both settings, there is room for fellowship, but the fellowship looks a little different.

There's room for the ritual of remembering who Christ was and what he did for him. But in each place, it looks a little different. And there's room for worship and praise.

[14 : 19] But in the one, a little bit more liturgical and set in the other, there's room. And this led to them being seen and found as having favor and people wanting to be a part of them.

This was an attractive community to be a part of. So in both places, there are similarities in their DNA, but orientation or facet just seem a little different in each place.

I remember earlier on in the table in a lot of our social media, we had this thing called, it's hashtag that said life around the table. Just a number of words, hashtag life around the table.

But the way it was applied to different things made that hashtag take on different meanings. I mean, I've seen it where there'd be a picture of somebody performing communion. This is life around the table.

And it has a completely different connotation than seeing a bunch of people laughing, playing a game at a table during a table group, small group. And that again, life around the table.

[15 : 19] We see it in the large setting and the small setting, in the informal and the formal. Each time, there's a different facet to that hashtag.

But all of it is in the same movement. And that's what we're seeing here. Between the large and the small, same DNA, same hashtag, different expression.

One of my favorite Australian theologians, which I'm sure that is something that is in almost every single sermon that I preach here at the table. Also, like, I am a big nerd.

You know, we all knew that. And probably a quote from my dad usually makes it in one of them or another. And I do probably say something about who you are becoming. Those are my catchphrases. So if you see them, you know, bingo for you.

But one of my favorite Australian theologians is Michael Frost. And he was in the missional movement for a long time. Still is, actually. And teaches at Morley College of Theology.

[16 : 17] He was a part of a faith movement called Small Boat Big C. And in this faith movement, they made a decision that they wanted to have the same DNA worked into their small groups as they do in their larger setting.

So they developed this set of beliefs that they put in this acronym called BELS that they, anybody who was a part of the church would commit to do in the personal sense and in the communal sense.

of the church believes that God is a sent and sending God, that God sent himself to us and that as he was here and as Jesus died for us, that we are too being sent and are also enabling each other to be sent.

So God is a sent and sending God and we are sent and sending people. So when they set up their bells, it was within that framework. And B stood for BLESS. So they were, each week, part of their agreement was to bless three people.

So one person was in our faith community and one person would be in the community that we are sent to and the third could be whoever the Spirit called us to do. The second one was EAT. They believed, again, that life happens around a table.

[17 : 29] You are on a different footing with somebody you eat with than you are somebody you yell at over the internet or somebody that you see at a distance. So everyone committed to eat three different meals or, you know, a coffee or something.

One with somebody in their faith community, one with somebody in the community that they were sent to and the third, wherever God called them to go. Then first L was for listen. They committed to spending at least an hour every week listening to the Holy Spirit.

Second L, for learning. They committed to spending an hour each week learning more about the person of Jesus. Whether it's by reading in the Gospels or reading some of the letters of Paul and seeing what elements of Christ were present in that or by reading a book that somebody had written today that was calling us to, again, challenge who we are in our understanding of Christ.

But they were responsible for doing that. And the S for this was sentness, that they would understand and live by the principle that God is a sent and sending God and that they are a sent and sending people.

And they have a community that they're called to and they're actively participating in for God's kingdom to come. And in the small settings, in their small groups, they would use this with each other.

[18 : 50] Tell me who you blessed this week. How did that go? Who did you eat with this week? How did that go? What did you hear from the Spirit? What have you learned about Jesus? If you didn't spend time listening, what stood in the way?

What can we do to help you get that balance back, that rhythm back? So the group spent time encouraging each other to grow and disciple and continue these habits and patterns and building them into each other's lives.

And in their large setting, they would sit down together at big tables on Sunday. And they would bless one another and serve one another and eat together.

And in the course of that meal, somebody would share something about Jesus and they would learn and listen and spend that time hearing about their God.

And then they would spend some time together corporately listening to hear what the Holy Spirit would say. And then encourage one another in their sentness, in their mission every day.

[19 : 52] I find that very fascinating. I love the idea of having a DNA that is written both in the small setting and working in the big setting of the church. This is our mission.

and our calling. And this is how we're going to live that out. And I feel like this is what we see in the early church. Same things, things that are similar in both places, but yet a different expression of that DNA in both settings.

My dad, who is a pastor, once said that you can inspire and inform in the large gathering and you transform in the small.

And that makes sense because our corporate spaces really imbibe that public and social proxemics categories.

And it is a place where we can have high invitation, the welcome, the inspiration, the information to kind of begin to get and set a vision to move forward.

[20 : 55] But the smaller setting, that is much more the personal proxemic space. It's where you can get vulnerable and you can share your life. It's where intimacy can get built over time.

There is invitation, yes, but this is also where confrontation can happen too, where we call each other to continue to grow.

both spaces are necessary for our health. We need the corporate experience together where we can have good coffee and share stories, where our favorite worship song comes on and we start entering in and notice and see the way the people around us are also entering in, where somebody can laugh and we, and somebody can share amen and we can identify with those moments.

we can have a moment around tables before church starts where we meet people and identify that we are both here in need of grace.

We can chat about our favorite fast food meals or what makes us feel better when we are down. We need this space. But we also need the smaller community.

[22 : 14] Community where we are real, where we can support one another, where we can be present in our communities and do life together.

Generally speaking, we are made for both spaces. And if we are out of balance, if that tension between high, and the holy tension between high invitation and high confrontation does not exist, then we can get out of balance too.

If all we have is the public and social, large, inspirational places, then where is the discipleship? Where does the change happen? Where is the action?

And without trying to throw megachurches under the bus, this can really be the besetting sort of sin of megachurches, where experience becomes paramount. Because having you present in the social and public spaces is the way we define belonging.

But if we only have the small community, we are also missing out. Sometimes when you have a small group that stays together and has been together for a long time, they can have things that happen, liminal moments, that can lead them to exclusivity, where the bar and the threshold for belonging becomes too high for anybody else to join.

[23 : 41] These groups grow together and become close, in fact insular, focused on each other, and then sometimes can really miss and lose the mission.

You can be resistant to change and newness. And if something happens, somebody moves, something goes wrong, the group can implode or lose focus or even burn out because we're so intensely involved.

In this, it's my family, my group becomes paramount to anything else. And in some ways, this can be what happens with a lot of church plants, where you have a core group of people who are focused on this mission of creating something new and they work hard together, they pour their life and soul into a movement that they feel God is calling them to.

But when the church starts becoming the very thing that they had the vision to plant, it suddenly isn't that tight-knit, close community that you've had for so long.

And it's easy to get disillusioned or just feel it's not the same and move away. We need both spaces because we are made for both spaces.

[25 : 01] So over the next two weeks, we're going to be exploring in depth both of those, the larger setting and the smaller setting and what makes each one unique and beautiful and necessary for the life we do together.

It's important for us as we spend these next few weeks to enter into these spaces mostly because we need to think about what we're moving towards creating again and the space that we need to create in this virtual community to meet all those needs, especially during this time when we're so socially isolated.

We want to create spaces that help keep this holy tension between high invitation and high challenge. We want to be intentional so that we can enable healthy Christians and healthy discipleship to be a community of inspired and motivated and transformed missional followers of Jesus.

In essence, to be authentic, thoughtful, and engaged. Doing life around the table together.

Let's pray. God, you are the God of all the spaces. You are with us in the social and the personal, in the transparent and the public.

[26 : 32] God, you are the God who makes even the places where we are alone sacred spaces. Lead us and walk us through what your kingdom looks like through the spaces that we inhabit.

Help us become your thoughtful and authentic followers. Help us to be your engaged people in D.C., in the DMV, and in our world, and even in these online spaces.

Come, invite us to the table so that we can do life with you. in your name we pray. Amen. Amen.