



The Effective Evangelistic Invitation



Sammy Gilbreath

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Office of Evangelism
Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions
P.O. Box 11870
Montgomery, AL 36111-0870
1.800.264-1225
www.alsbom.org

Printed by Davis Direct, Montgomery, Alabama, in the
United States of America

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D e d i c a t i o n



To my father
Billy L. Gilbreath
from whom I caught evangelism.

He taught me to share my faith
as a ten-year-old boy and, right up
until his death, urged me to write this book.



Introduction

In the past several years I have spoken to pastors conferences all over Alabama about giving an effective evangelistic invitation. After each one, without exception, I would be asked when this material would be in print and available. My response was and still is "I am not a writer!" With fear and trembling I finally agreed to try to put into print some of my thoughts.

I do not approach this as one knowing all the answers but rather one who is constantly looking for a better way, just like you, to communicate the Gospel and to extend an invitation as clearly and urgently as the Holy Spirit will allow. I have tried to design this book to help you become more aware of the need to plan the invitation deliberately.

I want you to understand the invitation is the moment of truth when people can and should respond to Christ. I want you to begin the sermon preparation with the end in mind. Dr. Charles Carter, pastor emeritus of Shades Mountain Baptist Church, Birmingham, points out that giving the invitation not only has Biblical foundations but historical illustrations as well. Jonathan Edwards,

Charles Finney, Billy Sunday and Billy Graham all emphasized the public invitation. I am more than willing to follow that group of Godly men!

I also want to convey that the word "invitation" is more than a casual request for some kind of positive response. The invitation includes an appeal to repent and affirmatively respond to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

I pray that your reading time will be rewarded with a renewed urgency in your sermon and invitation preparation. I pray that God will get the glory and that His kingdom will receive the increase.

Thanks for allowing me to share my thoughts with you and remember—

BE AGGRESSIVE...

BE BOLD...

BE INTENTIONAL.

It is only "GOOD NEWS" if they hear it in time!

Sammy

Sammy Gilbreath

Director of Evangelism

Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions

Chapter 1 PREPARATION AND THE WORK OF PRAYER

Preparation for the sermon and invitation begins with a commitment to pray. Prayer takes time, so determine your schedule for prayer and preparation and arrange your other duties around the protected time. Seek to eliminate any distractions. Avoid office phone calls by simply asking your ministry assistant to hold all calls or just let your calls go to voice mail or an answering machine and turn off your cell phone.

While this book is not a work on prayer it should be very obvious that sermon preparation would be shallow at best without prayer. When you begin to pray and prepare, ask “Who is going to be in the service?” Think of one person and let the possibility of a changed life motivate your prayer



time and preparation. Think of people that you have invited, family and friends of faithful members who will be there — hurting, empty and needing Christ to change their life. We need to truly believe that the power of God can change their lives by changing their minds. The grace of God and the love of God are available to every person that will hear this message. If we can come to the preaching time believing that God can and will change lives, there will be passion in the preaching every time.

The appeal of the sermon is not complete without an effective invitation. We must come to the time of invitation with the same passion and expectation as we did with the sermon. Prepare for the invitation with prayer that the Holy Spirit will work His work and hearts will be opened to the gospel invitation.

In Richard Shepherd’s *A Day in Prayer* he writes “we must prepare physically, mentally and spiritually to pray.” Jack Taylor, in his book *Prayer...the Priority*, writes, “I find it easier to preach on prayer than to pray. I find it easier to write on prayer than to pray. I find it easier to talk about Jesus than to pray. I find anything I do in my Christian life easier than praying.”

Preparation and the Work of Prayer

We must make the commitment and pay the price of prayer and preparation if the sermon and invitation are going to be what God wants from us.

I want this little book to be very practical so here are some suggestions for your sermon and invitation prayer time:

- ◆ Pray for empowerment.
- ◆ Pray for boldness.
- ◆ Pray for the right message.
- ◆ Pray for clear communication.
- ◆ Pray for the lost, by name, to be saved.
- ◆ Pray for the Holy Spirit to convict and convince the unsaved.
- ◆ Pray for church members to be attentive and supportive during the invitation.
- ◆ Pray for the Christian who needs recommitment.

Chapter 2

INSPIRATION AND PASSIONATE EVANGELISTIC PREACHING

I have been accused of being great at stating the obvious but I will say it anyway! It is difficult to give a passionate invitation if there has been no passion in the sermon. Most of us pastors have lived and died by the weekly sermon. Every day from Monday through Saturday we look for ideas and illustrations and live with the hope and fears that Sunday will bring. I always want to be ready, prayed up, prepared and able to communicate the message the Lord has given me with a passion that is equal to the thought that this could be my last sermon.

I understand what Paul meant in I Corinthians 1:21: “...it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.” Paul did not mean that I am to be a foolish preacher — ill-prepared, lacking power due to the absence of prayer, poorly communicating the message and giving a passionless invitation. If the invitation is going to be one of passion then the sermon must have practical application and scriptural exegesis, and must be wrapped in passionate delivery.

Come on, let’s be honest and admit that most people do not remember a great deal of the sermon. That realization may wound our ego but it might help us in preparation if we focus on what we want them to remember. The cute, fancy alliterated outline may impress our peers but it is the practical application that the person in the pew — hurting, wanting to know how to get through Monday — really wants to hear. The long explanation of Bultmanian theology may thrill us but probably will not help that parent whose child overdoses at school Monday.

I do not want to get into preaching styles but I like what Clyde Fant wrote in *Twenty Centuries of Great Preaching*: “It is impossible to define the terms ‘textual,’ ‘topical,’ and ‘expository.’ Whatever your style, is the sermon found in the truth of God’s Word and can you deliver it with passion and have you determined the desired outcome so that the invitation can be used by God to change lives?”

“For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” (Hebrews 4:12, NASB)

Chapter 3

PRESENTATION AND THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

God uses three elements to draw sinners to Himself. I am not going to try and rank the order or place them in some priority of importance, but rather just list my thoughts for you. One is the work of the Holy Spirit. In John 6:44, we learn *“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day”* (NIV).



The Holy Spirit acts in the heart and mind of the sinner to draw him to Christ. He works to create a spiritual hunger and thirst for true righteousness. The Holy Spirit accomplishes His work through the Word of God. He inspired the Word and sent it to accomplish His holy purpose.

A second element God uses, even prior to the service and the message of the preacher, is the witness of the believer. The third element God uses is a combination of His Word and the preacher.

Through the Word of God the Holy Spirit does at least three things. First, He convicts of the sin of not believing in Christ. Second, He convicts of righteousness. Third, He convicts of judgment because Satan has already been judged and stands condemned.

It is critical that we understand the evangelistic invitation does not bring conviction. We must not try to get so “slick” in our message or invitation that we leave out what only the Holy Spirit can do. We want to have the message and the invitation so well-prepared and presented that the Holy Spirit does not have to do His work in spite of us. I have heard preachers say jokingly, “Well, you know, God can bless a mess,” and that is true, but He should not have to do that.

Many modern invitations are superficial or designed to make the hearers feel good. Some churches even celebrate the fact that people can attend their services without feeling guilty about their lifestyle. In the book of Acts, Peter’s sermon and invitation did not have that effect. It cut and pierced the heart of the hearers. Maybe that is why almost one-fourth of our churches today do not baptize even one new convert in an entire year’s time.

Many of us who preach and give an invitation wonder why we seldom experience a harvest. Could

Presentation and the Work of the Holy Spirit

it be that we have left out the work of the Holy Spirit? If we find that is true, I pray for a brokenness and a return to preaching and giving an invitation with power and conviction under His leadership!

Chapter 4

INVITATION FOR A DESIRED OUTCOME

There are many aspects of giving an effective evangelistic invitation for a desired outcome. I will deal with only seven.

1. Begins with conviction
2. Burns with compassion
3. Bold because of consecration
4. Beautiful because of clarity
5. Born through claiming others to be saved
6. Backed by counselors
7. Bathed in celebration

1. The invitation should **begin with conviction**. If we who are preaching are not convicted that people need to have their lives changed, I doubt that we can present an invitation that will cause them to believe that either. The sermon and the invitation should help people be open to the conviction by the Holy Spirit that their lifestyles are contrary to the will of God and that they need their lives changed. If they are convicted by the Holy Spirit and respond through repentance, God will begin to change their behavior by changing their

beliefs. We need to believe that God can change a person's behavior by changing their beliefs.

The word that we must not get away from here is repentance. It is out of this conviction about their lives that we are calling people to come forward with repentance, confessing Jesus Christ as Lord. This conviction and repentance will change the way people act. The repentance does not change behavior, but it results in a changed behavior through Christ living in us. If the sermon and the invitation are not dealing with conviction and repentance, I am not sure it is real preaching.

When I consider the desired outcome, I want to ask, "Do I really expect a response?" I am convinced that the invitation I extend is affected by what I expect to happen.

I have heard, though I cannot verify, that Charles Spurgeon was approached by a young preacher who expressed concern that he was not having conversions when he preached. Spurgeon asked, "Surely you don't expect conversions every time you preach, do you?" to which the young preacher reportedly said, "Well, I suppose not." Spurgeon then said, "That is precisely why you are not having them."

I am keenly aware that there are small congregations where the lost might not be present in every

Invitation for a Desired Outcome

service. However, we surely would not discount the fact that someone, already a believer, might have a real need to repent of a moral failure or some other sin that is separating them from the joy of their salvation.

Giving the invitation and expecting a positive response is an attitude we need to develop. Did you ever have someone invite you to go or do something with him and you couldn't help but feel that their invitation was insincere or half-hearted at best? Sometimes I think we leave this impression with people when we give the invitation regarding following Christ. C. E. Matthews wrote, "All that is done in the name of Christ, regardless of what the nature of that service may be, is only a means to an end, namely, the winning of lost souls to Jesus Christ as Savior."

Telling people about Jesus is not difficult. The difficult part is getting them to see the urgency and the advantage of committing their lives to Jesus as Lord and Savior today. Every preacher should understand the full meaning of an invitation to the lost and how to help them make that decision which will settle their eternal destiny. Evangelistic invitations are given for a verdict. In fact, if we take the sermons of the New Testament seriously, we could conclude that all sermons and invitations are

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for a decision. When the sermon concludes and the invitation is extended, the time has arrived for the consummation of everything that has been done in the name of our Lord up to that moment. All of the preparation for that service — the visitation, the publicity, the music, the prayers, the sermon and the time spent by the congregation in worship — everything has been done to make ready for that invitation.

The majority of the congregations and many ministers have little or no concept of the seriousness or the inexpressible importance of the invitation. There are those churches where a good sermon has been preached but no appeal is made. The congregation stands, people start putting on coats, gathering their things and a half-hearted statement is made like, "If there are those present who wish to unite with the church, you may talk with us after the service."

Nothing much is expected and that is usually what happens — nothing. Pastor, we have the responsibility of informing the congregation of the seriousness of the invitation with conviction, passion and urgency! They will catch that from us.

Our own personal demeanor will say more than all of the teaching in the world. Just as I believe evangelism is caught more than it is taught, so do I

Invitation for a Desired Outcome

believe the seriousness and urgency of the invitation is caught from us by the staff, volunteers and members.

There are many different kinds of invitations. Roy Fish, in his book *Giving a Good Invitation*, says that there are a number of incentives within a person to which an invitation appeals. Dr. Fish lists:

self-preservation	need for a friend
yearning for freedom	fulfillment
adventure in life	influence
supreme duty	gratitude
recognition and acceptance	higher quality of life

In most cases, four basic types of invitation can be used:

1. The invitation to trust Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.
2. The invitation to pursue vocational Christian service.
3. The invitation to rededicate or reconsecrate one's life.
4. The invitation to transfer one's church membership.

The invitation may include more than one of these types to make the needed appeal. It is important to project the desired outcome and know

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who will be present and state these on the preparation worksheet at the end of this book, so that the invitation can be clearly communicated (*see page 42*).

2. The invitation should **burn with compassion**. The invitation is never a time to “beat people up” but rather a time to demonstrate compassion. Regardless of the circumstances, the person in the service who needs a fresh touch from God is hurting. Sin may be fun for a season but ultimately it hurts and hurts badly. The invitation should be given with love, patience and gentleness. The preacher, of all people, should not use the invitation as a time to scold, criticize or condemn, but rather to affirm, encourage and walk with them through their difficulties.

It has always helped me to try and identify with people. Even during the sermon I try to make eye contact all around the room and talk to people. It is easy to get into the habit of looking just over the heads of the people and talking generally even if we are dealing with specifics.

Try to imagine that the lady from a broken marriage could be your daughter or mother; that the man who lost his job and is in deep depression could be your son or dad; that the older couple grieving over the loss of an adult child or grandchild might be you someday; that the struggling

Invitation for a Desired Outcome

teen or young adult with a drug or alcohol problem is someone's little girl or boy, even if they are no longer living at home. I remember an ugly divorce attacking some of my close friends who were once my best encouragers. It can and does happen to friends, church members and family.

Sin hurts and scars. It will distort the truth and make it difficult for people to make good decisions. Even more important than identifying with their plight, we must remember God allowed His own Son to die for them. They are important to Him. Hurt with them. Weep with them. When that invitation is compassionate and you really identify with hurt and disappointment, people can feel and sense the authenticity.



There is nothing that turns people off, even from God, like a messenger and invitation that is insincere. Remember, when planning the invitation, ask, "Who is going to be here?" Never preach a message to openly address a specific person in the service. However, knowing that a specific person might be present, or at least identifying the possibility, encourages prayer for them and invitational statements that will lead to a desired outcome.

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3. The invitation should be **bold because of consecration**. I am not sure that I can put into words the awesome responsibility I feel when I am preparing and then delivering a sermon. The invitation is especially that way because I realize my own walk with the Lord must be above question.

I have personally known of men who spent great amounts of time preaching, hammering on a sin, only to find that they were guilty of that very sin. Hypocrisy has no place in the pulpit and invitation! Sure, I know that we all have sinned and that there will never be a time that I will stand and give an invitation from perfection, but I must remember that Paul said, "*Shall we continue in sin...*" (Romans 6:1). I cannot get up and deliver a sermon and extend an invitation with unconfessed sin in my life, without it discrediting my very witness.

Can you imagine preaching on the sanctity of the home and marriage and then giving an invitation for men and women to come and make a commitment to fidelity, while living in secret adultery and moral failure? Can you imagine preaching on holiness while deeply involved in pornography? Unconfessed sin makes it difficult, if not impossible, for any of us to present a believable gospel and a sincere invitation. I could go on and on but you get the point. It is sufficient to say, I think, that the in-

Invitation for a Desired Outcome

invitation **should** be bold because of the brokenness of the people and **can** be bold if our consecration is above reproach.

That must be a daily battle, but in those last few minutes before I get up to preach, I want to check, one more time, my relationship with my Lord. Come on pastors, let's preach it and live it so that we can preach it again! Remember Paul said, *"And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men?"* (1 Corinthians 3:1-3, NASB). We must not give in to the flesh if we are going to have a word for our people and give an invitation with boldness.

4. The invitation should be beautiful because of clarity. I don't know how many services I have been in where I thought the sermon was well done but the invitation left me totally confused. There obviously had been no thought given to desired outcome. The transition was awkward and the people were never sure what they were being asked to do. If I had been in need of making some kind of decision I am not sure I would have known how to respond.

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When we give the invitation it should be done with such clarity that the people know exactly what we want them to do. We should tell them precisely how and where we want them to come to express their decision and tell them who will greet them.

Remember, many of the very people we are trying to reach may have little or no concept of how the church operates or the language it uses. If you are going to take them out of the sanctuary/worship center to a prayer room, then tell them exactly what is going to take place. If you, the preacher, are not going to receive them, tell them who will. I think there is great comfort and encouragement if the one preaching can say, "If you are willing to accept Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord, I want you to leave your seat and meet me here at the front. I would love to pray with you and show you how to invite Christ into your life."

If you are the guest speaker then make it clear that the pastor will be at the front to greet and pray with those who come forward. Make sure that you and the pastor are on the same page about the invitation, and you know exactly how the pastor wants to handle the invitation. Do not say or commit to something that the church and pastor are uncomfortable with or cannot deliver.

Invitation for a Desired Outcome

When the invitation is to be extended to those who want to join the church by baptism or transfer of their letter, be sure that you make it very clear what you are asking them to do. Be very clear in stating the way the church receives members. Do not mislead them by making broad statements like, “We invite anyone and everyone to come as you are,” if the church, in fact, could not accept someone “for any reason.” Or, if the invitation is broadened to include those who need to recommit their lives, make sure you explain that as well. Do not cheapen the decision by not making it clear what you want them to do.

If the invitation is given correctly, people who are hurting and concerned about some friend or relative will join you in a brokenness like you have never seen. When this kind of invitation is given you can and should expect others to be saved in the days and weeks to come. People cannot pray for others by name very long without doing something about it. They may go make a visit or get you or your outreach team to go, but something will happen!

5. The invitation should be **born through claiming others to be saved**. I am convinced that when people begin to pray for the lost or unchurched by name, things begin to happen.

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The invitation can be given by saying something like this: “Can you think of one person by name who does not know Christ? If you can, would you come and join me here at the altar and let me pray with you for that person specifically by name?”

Let the congregation know when they come forward that they can stand, sit or kneel. (I add this because many of our senior adults who are concerned about their children and grandchildren want to come forward, but they cannot physically kneel). I think this should be done with great courtesy, love, compassion and gentleness. This is not the time to condemn, criticize or chastise.

Remember this kind of invitation can be emotional and you can forget what you promised the people you would do. Always be honest and true to your word. If you said, “Let me pray with you,” then make sure you close that part of the invitation by praying out loud for those who have come and for those for whom they prayed. I like to give this kind of invitation at the first part of the overall invitation. There are very few times or places where there is no one concerned about someone.

I usually follow the first statement by saying something like, “If you would like to come and invite Jesus Christ into your life, now would be a good time to do that. There will be several people

joining me here and you can just step out in the aisle and come with them. I will meet you right here at the front and would love to pray with you while these are praying for their lost friends and relatives.”

6. The invitation should be **backed by counselors**. Many times I have witnessed a service come to a halt because no thought was given to dealing with those coming forward. If we are truly giving an invitation with a desired outcome then we should prepare for dealing with those who respond.

I think the invitation has great appeal when people are invited to “join me here at the altar.” However, you cannot continue the invitation if you are dealing with a person who has come forward. Others will not come if they see that they cannot get to you. There is a negative psychological aspect to coming forward and having to wait in line. The guilt and embarrassment becomes overwhelming so they just do not move.

Plan to have several staff members or lay persons trained and ready. Greet the person, maybe even walk up the aisle toward him and ask why he has come. Tell him who is going to pray with him and where that is going to be done. Then quickly reposition yourself to greet the next person. If someone comes even in that short time you are greeting a person, you should have someone else

ready to greet him. Do not leave people standing in the aisle! The invitation can be stated, “Come and I will greet you here at the altar. We have caring people who will pray with you and help you make the decision the Lord is leading you to make.”

Be clear, honest and caring in the invitation about the use of counselors/encouragers. You should also consider the issue of using the word “counselor” versus “encourager” or some other term. There have been cases where the word counselor can only be used if the one counseling has a degree in counseling. There are other terms like encourager, prayer partner, etc. You should pick the word you are comfortable with while not putting yourself at risk legally.

Do not assume that everyone is trained and capable to help in the invitation. Remember, you are asking people to come and make life-changing decisions. Make every effort to recruit and train loving, caring people who understand confidentiality. The invitation is **dead in the water** if people think their decision is going to be discussed or even made reference to. There is no place for gossip flowing from the altar. Be careful that you never mention in your sermon other decisions made at the altar for fear that someone might conclude, correctly so, that they might be the next illustration.

7. The invitation should be **bathed in celebration**. I am always interested to observe how a pastor and church respond following the invitation. This should be a time of celebration; therefore we need to know how to end the invitation on a positive note. I know that many times I have preached and given the invitation as the guest speaker and watched many people move and I knew that several key decisions were made. I completed the invitation and turned it over to the pastor expecting him to celebrate the wonderful outpouring of the Holy Spirit only to have just the opposite happen. I saw what could have been a real celebration turn into a negative ending. He recapped the sermon, sang three more stanzas and proceeded to beat people up for not coming the first time. Those who needed to come had already made decisions and we could have celebrated, but now there was a defeated attitude because no one came on the last three stanzas.

Learn to be very sensitive to the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Present to the church the people making decisions and celebrate their decisions with them. Even if there is to be further discussion or counseling they can be recognized and celebrated. If there is a new member class before they are received into membership, the decision to join can still be celebrated in the invitation where they

responded. I know there are different styles of worship but any style of worship can celebrate with an “amen” or an applause.

Celebrate those who have come praying for their lost friends or relatives asking the church to join them in their concern. Celebrate with those who rededicated their lives. Celebrate with those who accepted Christ as their Savior. Celebrate baptism decisions and the act of baptism itself. We are living in a society that celebrates all kinds of victories. Teach the church how to celebrate the victorious invitation. Celebrate the victories won for the Kingdom of God.

Don't be afraid to ask a friend or relative to come stand with someone who made a decision. This is not just for those being saved. A recommitment of one's life is a major decision and should not be taken lightly. Ask those who prayed for or witnessed to that person to come and stand with him. This is not only good for the one making the decision but great encouragement for the faithful Christian. This is also wonderful encouragement for others to pray and witness to their friends and family. End the invitation with a great, positive celebration.

**I believe there is “rejoicing in heaven.”
Why shouldn't we rejoice?**

Chapter 5

ELEMENTS VITAL TO AN EFFECTIVE EVANGELISTIC INVITATION

Many factors contribute to an effective evangelistic invitation. Here are six I consider vital.

1. Voice

The invitation is a time to change your voice! That means use a different tone from your preaching voice. Maybe lower your voice for emphasis. Use your voice here like you are in conversation with the person in the pew. Your voice should convey seriousness — this is no time for humor. Do not get in a hurry and speak too fast. If you have done correct preparation then you allowed plenty of time. Take it!

2. Patience

One simple statement here: don't rush! Allow the Holy Spirit to accomplish His work. There is nothing wrong with stopping the singing, having just soft music and you not saying a word. You can just let the people deal with the moment, their emotions, their convictions. Sometimes there is real

power in silence and time to deal with their need to make a decision.

3. Dealing with distractions

Be careful that you do not allow distractions during the invitation. Avoid unnecessary movement on the platform. I am prone to walk, and it can look like it is just for the sake of walking. When I review my own preaching I want to say, "Why did I do that?" Keep your hands away from your face. Little things like wiping sweat or pushing back your hair can be very distracting. The musicians, staff or volunteers should be very discreet in their movements. Watch out for subconscious actions like looking at your watch, shuffling papers, putting away your notes or Bible or adjusting your coat and tie.

4. Music

Make sure that you have gone over with the minister of music exactly what you are going to do during the invitation. If you are going to have the congregation sing then you should announce the hymn number or remind them that the words will be on the screen. Do this before you lead the prayer so that the moment you begin the invitation there will not be any disruption of the mood of the ser-

vice. Avoid a pompous instrumental introduction to the invitation hymn. Vary the music in the invitation. By that I mean do not always sing the same song. Familiarity breeds contempt! One time you might try using only soft music from your musicians. Maybe the next time you can use the choir or minister of music singing. When you vary the invitation music you keep the people's attention focused on what you are asking them to do. If the invitation is extended because of continued decisions being made, NEVER change the hymn number by asking the congregation to now turn to another page. This has instantly disrupted the mood, distracted their thoughts and redirected their attention to a hymn book. There is nothing wrong with continuing to sing the same song.

5. Variety

Don't be afraid to use different styles of invitations. This can be very effective and reduce the danger of the "familiarity breeds contempt" syndrome (like signing a decision card that will be followed up later). Consider asking people to raise their hands or stand at their seat to indicate a decision while the congregation has their heads bowed in prayer. You can then invite those who made decisions to come forward or even to see you after the

service if it is impossible because of the room arrangements to come forward. I have used this in a men's meeting like a wild game expo where a move forward would have been impossible.

6. Urgency

If I can keep in mind the issues that are present in people needing to make a decision, I will never have trouble approaching the invitation with urgency. Even before I was told that I had only a little time to live I tried to explain in every invitation how urgent it was to make the decision today. Now, understanding how special and delicate each day is, my sense of urgency in delivering the invitation is even more profound. It finally dawned on me that everyone in the service was just like me — no one has the promise of tomorrow. I ask myself this question as I plan the invitation: If someone in the service slips out into eternity before the next worship opportunity, what will I spend the rest of my life wishing that I had said or done in the invitation to emphasize the urgency of their decision? You see today is the right (and maybe the only) time to follow Christ! Why not approach every invitation like it might be the last one you will ever give? ***It very well might be!***

Chapter 6

FINAL THOUGHTS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In this book I have tried to provide some basic practical helps in preparing and giving an effective evangelistic invitation. I did not, nor did I intend to, debate the theological concerns around giving an invitation. I simply operate out of Revelation 22:17: “...and the Spirit and the bride say, **Come**. And let him that heareth say, **Come**. And let him that is athirst **come**. And **whosoever will**, let him take the water of life freely” (emphasis mine). It is my prayer that everyone who prepares a message will take the necessary time to prepare and give an effective invitation.



In the following pages, I’ve provided you a worksheet to copy and use alongside your sermon notes. I hope this will help in your preparation by reminding you of the book contents and page numbers where you can review if you need to do so.

I realize that very few books are the product of

just one person. This work also is the product of many. Charles Roesel, pastor emeritus of First Baptist Church, Leesburg, Florida, shared some great ideas. My ministry assistant Stephanie McClelland provided continued encouragement and professional help in typing and editing. Doug Rogers gave invaluable help in formatting, editing and preparing the book for publication and Ken Schroeder provided additional proofreading. The entire evangelism office staff and especially Dr. Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, provided encouragement and insight apart from which I could not have finished. Thanks to all and it is my prayer that God will get the glory and His kingdom will be enlarged as the Holy Spirit leads and convicts and Christ saves and adds to the church!

Invitation Worksheet

(Do not write here but make photo copies for a month at a time)

Checklist for the Sermon and Invitation

(Do not write here but make photo copies for a month at a time)

While you are preparing your sermon and invitation check these points to make sure you are on target to accomplish your desired outcome. The page number in the book is listed if you need to refresh your memory.

1. () Conviction (p. 19)
2. () Compassion (p. 24)
3. () Consecration (p. 26)
4. () Clarity (p. 27)
5. () Claiming Others (p. 29)
6. () Counselors (p. 31)
7. () Celebration (p. 33)

Sermon Date: _____

Sermon Title: _____

Sermon Text: _____

Who will be there (p.25): _____

Desired outcome (p. 19): _____

Sermon: _____

Now go tell them about Jesus.

Transition statements between sermon and invitation:

Invitation statements needed to accomplish desired outcome:

Now invite them to follow Jesus.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Sammy Gilbreath is a state missionary and the director of the Office of Evangelism for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, where he has served since 1996. In that position, Sammy plans, promotes and implements the total program of evangelism for Alabama Baptist churches and associations.

Prior to coming to the State Board of Missions, Sammy served as pastor of churches in Alabama, Mississippi, Kentucky and South Carolina from 1967 until 1996. He holds a master of divinity degree from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., and a doctor of ministry degree from Drew University, Madison, N.J.

Sammy and his wife, Carol, are members of Ridgecrest Baptist Church, Montgomery, Ala. They have a son who is married and lives in Montgomery and a daughter who is married and lives in Florence, Ala.



“In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.” (John 7:37-38)

It is only "GOOD NEWS" if they hear it in time!

Sammy

Sammy Gilbreath
Director of Evangelism
Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions

