Pastor Michael O'Neill. November 1, 2026

I'm In: I'm Invited
Part One

1. **Jesus invites those others reject.**
   - *Luke 7:36-50*

2. **God's grace changes what judgment never can.**
   - *Matthew 11:28-30*

3. **Because you are invited, invite others.**
   - *Luke 14:15-24*

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West Valley Church
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Michael O'Neill

I'm In:[1]
I'm Invited

If you take a coal out of the fire, before long it will burn out and grow cold. But if you place it near the other coals back in the fire, the coal will keep burning hot.

It's not enough to just show up at church. Our hearts long for more than that. We want to be needed. We want to be known. We want to have purpose and know that we make a difference. Today we are starting a new series that is an invitation for you to drive deep roots into our church, to see the difference you can make when you are a part of the church.

This new series is inspired by author and pastor Craig Groeschel, and it's called "I'm In." This message series is really about identity. What I want to do is help you understand the heart behind our church and to embrace four qualities that all begin with the letter I-N – "I'm In," starting today with, "I'm invited." I'm invited into God's family. The next is "I'm Invaluable," the third Sunday is "I'm Influential," and the fourth Sunday is "I'm Invested."

Today is one of the core themes of the Gospel, and that is that you are invited into God's family. Now, I don't know about you, but to me, one of the worst feelings is to feel left out, or to feel uninvited. Maybe you're scrolling along Instagram, and you see all your really good friends somewhere else, and you're not there, and suddenly there's a sinking feeling of why wasn't I invited?

A couple weeks ago I shared with you some of my story about how I didn't grow up in church and I didn't become a Christian until I was in high school. Remember I said that a big part of my life before becoming a Christian was what we called "partying" and that usually involved going to someone's house to drink and stuff. That was kind of the way it went – on Friday after we played the football game we'd go to wherever the party was that weekend. Well, after I became a Christian, I still went to those parties, but I didn't drink and do all the other stuff – I'd go and hang out with my friends because inevitably someone would ask me why I wasn't drinking and stuff, and then I'd get to tell them why: I'd tell them I found out that God himself loved me and Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead for me and he saved me from a sinful and superficial life; that I didn't need that stuff to enjoy life because I now had brand new life in Jesus – and they could too!

Well, after a few weeks of that, one night after the game I asked my friends where we were going that night, and they told me that they were not going out – one said that he had to get up early for work the next day, another that he was tired, another that he had too much homework. This went on for about three weeks, and then I found out that they were actually lying to me – they said that so that I'd go home and then they'd go out or go to a party somewhere. So I asked them why they were lying to me, and they said, "Because when you go with us, we begin to feel guilty." They're solution was to just leave me out.

[1] Sermon series source and inspiration: "I'm In," Life Church, Craig Groeschel

That really hurt – that I was being left out and uninvited by my best friends because of my faith.

Maybe you weren't rejected for your faith; maybe it was the other way around. Maybe you tried church before, but you felt judged or rejected by people in the church.

That happened to Joe Robins; he's a great guy in our church – he is on the worship team and plays guitar, he helps out as a part of our youth ministry leaders, and he was elected by you to serve on our Leadership Team. Joe told this story (he's given me permission to share it with you). Joe said that when he was a poor college kid he thought he'd try going to church. He didn't have any dressy clothes to wear, but he dressed as best as he could. When he got there, he realized that others were way more dressed up than he could be. He went to a Sunday School class, and the teacher had everyone say their name. After Joe introduced himself, the teacher said, "Joe here is a good example that you can come to church even if you don't dress right."

Maybe that teacher meant well, but it didn't come out that way!

If you've ever felt ashamed, unworthy, unwanted, or uninvited, I want you to hear one of the greatest truths of the gospel about Jesus, and that is this…

1. Jesus invites those others reject.

Jesus invites those that religion despises, that others overlook, those who feel like they're not good enough. You're invited to the family of God, because Jesus invites the people others reject. We all are!

We're going to see this from something that happened in Luke's gospel, chapter 7. Let me read the story to us, and as I do, would you stand with me?

> When one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume. As she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.
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> When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner."
>
> Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you."
>
> "Tell me, teacher," he said.
>
> "Two people owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii *(about a year and a half salary)*, and the other fifty *(about a month and a half)*. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?"
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> Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven."

"You have judged correctly," Jesus said.

Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little."

Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."

The other guests began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?"

Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace." (Luke 7:36-50, niv)

Thank you for standing; you can be seated.

Let me give you a context of this, so you'll understand what's going on. People didn't know if they should believe that Jesus was a prophet, or God, or if he was a crazy man. Most people would have thought, though, that if Jesus was indeed God in the flesh, then for sure the Pharisees would like him because the Pharisees were the religious leaders of the day. They were the most outwardly pious, most visibly religious. They wore these flowing robes with fancy tassels; they prayed long eloquent prayers and did these elaborate cleansing rituals. They were super spiritual. and surely they would never, ever be around anyone impure, anyone unclean, they would always distance themselves from sinners.

Well, one day, a Pharisee named Simon decided to throw a party at his house. A party that a Pharisee would throw is very much different from a party today. They wouldn't be roasting hot dogs or listening to the latest Jewish rap songs…what they would do is they would have a party of the who's who of Pharisees, and they would put on a display or a show by having a discussion about impressive things. It was a public event for them to show off the wealth of their knowledge. So they'd have this meal, and the meal would take place in what was known as the outer room of the house. The outer room was on the edge of the house, and almost always would be surrounded by a porch. So they would meet and recline and dine in this outer room, talking about really important things, and then they would leave the door to the porch open, so the common people could come from the outside, and listen to the Pharisees show off talking about cultural trends, about politics, about theology, and all kinds of stuff.

You might wonder why did people come and listen? You have to understand there was no internet or Wi-Fi, there were no gamers or streamers, no TV, no Netflix to sit around and binge watch The Housewives of Jerusalem, or whatever. These gatherings were like free first century entertainment. So Jesus got invited to this party, and suddenly someone else came that was not invited. And when this person walked into the party, it was the most shocking thing these holier than thou Pharisees had ever experienced, and they hated every moment of it. In verse 37 we're told that a woman in that town who lived a sinful life approached Jesus. Let me tell you that's code language for the town prostitute. That's what that essentially means. A woman there in town who had lived a sinful life learned that Jesus

was eating at the Pharisee's house, and she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume. So imagine this: the Pharisees are sitting in the outer room, they are waxing eloquently, impressing everybody there. And suddenly, a call girl walks into the party. And every Pharisee gasps – they are beside themselves. "This isn't right, she wasn't invited, she's unclean, she's impure, she's a sinner, she's one of *those* people and we don't hang around *those* people. She's unworthy, she was not invited."

I want you to pause for a moment and try to get into the mind of this young, hurting woman, and imagine what would it have been like to be her. What was her situation? I would bet my life on the fact that she never dreamed of growing up to be a prostitute. I doubt that when she was 8 years old and had her girlfriends over for a slumber party, and someone asks, "what do you want to be when you grow up?" One girl says, "I want to work in real estate," and another says, "I want to be a doctor," and another says, "I want to be a YouTube star" and then this girl says, "I want to be a hooker!" She never said that, I promise you. So if that's not what she wanted, how did she end up there? This was a shameful, dark, degrading thing. Maybe she had suffered abuse and so she felt unlovable. In that culture if word got out that a girl was violated or got pregnant, she was rejected as sinful – even when it wasn't her fault. Or maybe early on, she made some bad decisions, and those things spiraled, she got in the wrong crowd, and that led her in a bad direction. I don't know for sure. What I do know is that she never wanted that lifestyle. What I do know is that everywhere she went, every day, men used her and abused her and women glared hatefully, scorning her every step of the way. What I do know is she would've felt unloved. She would've felt very ashamed. And she never, ever would've felt invited to anywhere safe – anywhere that mattered. What I do know is she might feel like a lot of us feel, not good enough, guilty for where we've been, wondering how we ended up where we are today. "I never thought I'd be…" fill in the blank: I never thought I'd be divorced, filed bankruptcy, rejected by one of my children. I never thought I'd be here today. She felt uninvited.

What did she do? This woman walks into the Pharisee's party, heads straight for Jesus and falls to her knees in a posture of worship. Then she breaks open a jar of perfume and pours it on Jesus's feet. This was significant for at least a couple reasons: number one, because this was her most valuable possession. We learn in Scripture that perfume is actually very rare, almost no one could afford it. The value of it would've been about a year's worth of her salary. That was all her savings. Not only was it valuable financially, but perfume was kind of like her business card or her advertisement, if you understand. By pouring it out, she was showing that she was giving up that life, that she was going to leave it behind. In one glorious single act, she simultaneously extravagantly worshiped Jesus, and was symbolically repenting of her old lifestyle, saying, "I'll give away my past, my life, my most valuable possession and that which represents my future. It's the best I have, and at this moment, I'm offering it all to Jesus." She worshiped him, in that moment, crying in repentance. Verse 38 says, as she stood behind Jesus at his feet, weeping, she couldn't stop her crying. Her tears got his feet wet. Then she wiped them with her hair, and kissed them, and poured perfume on them. She couldn't stop the emotion; she just kept crying. Then she wiped his feet with her hair. Now I need to pause for a moment, and tell you the significance of this. In the days of Jesus, that would've been considered completely inappropriate, because a Jewish woman would never, never unbind her hair in public. But she is so overcome with emotion worshiping Jesus, and she doesn't have a towel, and she

realized, “I just cried all over his feet,” and so she takes her hair down and uses her hair to wipe his feet because she just can't contain her love and her adoration and her worship for the Son of God.

In verse 39, the Pharisees were beside themselves. When the Pharisee who had invited Jesus (that's Simon), when Simon the Pharisee saw this he said to himself, (not out loud but in his mind), he said to himself, “if this man Jesus really was a prophet he would know who's touching him, and what kind of woman she is, that she's a sinner.” In other words, Simon thinks the fact that Jesus is letting this prostitute touch him proves he's not the Son of God, and he's not a prophet.

Then Jesus basically responds by saying, “I just read your mind.” Jesus speaks to Simon while looking at the woman and says, "Do you see this woman, Simon? "I came into your house, and you didn't give me any water for my feet *(it was customary so that guests could wash their feet)*, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. Simon, you didn't give me a kiss *(also a customary greeting)*, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. Simon, you didn't put oil on my head *(again, customary to honor a guest)*, but she poured perfume on my feet. Therefore Simon, I tell you, yes she's a sinner, but her many sins have been forgiven, as you can see by her great love. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little. Then Jesus looks at this hurting woman and says, "Your sins are forgiven. You are white as snow, you are whole, you are new."

That’s because…

2. God's grace changes what judgment never can.

Here's a question I'd like to try to answer: Why did this woman risk so much to be at the feet of Jesus? Think about this, why? When she heard Jesus was at this party, why did she run home and get her perfume out of her safe, why does she rush back across town, into this house past the very men who might've propositioned her or abused her? Why would she have gone through the porch, where the common people were, who would've whispered in judgement at her and said to each other, “Don't ever go near her, she's one of *those* people.” Why would she have gone into the house of a Pharisee who wouldn't even walk on the same side of the street as her? Why would she have ignored every other person in the room, and gone straight to the feet of Jesus? The text doesn't tell us, but I can tell you what I believe. What I believe is she must've somehow, somewhere experienced the unconditional love and indescribable grace of Jesus. She certainly must've seen a miracle, or heard him teach, or sensed his divine nature. In fact, let me tell you what I think happened. I think because Jesus was in her town, I think she probably heard him preach. My guess is it was probably *that* day, because of the urgency of her nature to break into the party where she knew that Jesus was. If it was that day, what message did she hear? Well, earlier in this very same chapter Luke tells us that on that day, the disciples of John the Baptist came to question Jesus. Matthew's gospel tells us the parallel version of that very same story, and talks about the day when John the Baptist's disciples came to question Jesus. And on that very day, which would've been earlier on the day that she came to the party of the house of the Pharisee, Jesus gave a message. What was his message? I will

summarize it, then I'll show you the message. The summary of the message that Jesus gave that day, that perhaps this woman heard from the back of a crowd because she was too ashamed to get up close, the summary of the message that Jesus gave on that day was this: *you are invited to God's family. You are invited, you are welcome, you can come just as you are*. The message this woman would've heard, if she was there in the crowd on that day she broke into the house of the Pharisee, this is the exact message she would've heard the Son of God proclaim. Jesus said *this* on *that* day:

> "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30, niv)

Can you feel his love? Come to me, those who are wrecked and overcome with guilt. Come to me, those who are burdened by shame. Come to me, those who are tired of trying, and never living up to their own standards, much less living up anywhere near to God's standards. Come to me, those who've been rejected, again and again by people. Come to me, those who religion turned away. Come to me, those of you who didn't have the right clothes to wear to the right church, because someone who didn't represent truly the love of God told you that you weren't invited, or you weren't welcome. Come to me, come to me when you feel like you've got nothing left. Come to me when you've lost all hope. Come to me when everything in you feels desperate and doesn't know if you can go on. Jesus says you come to me when you're weary, when you're overwhelmed, and I will give you a heavenly rest. Jesus says, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, "for I'm gentle and humble in heart, "and you will find rest for your souls." Jesus said, "You're still invited. You're welcome in God's family. My Father sent me to tell you he loves you. You're invited; you're invited."

I want you to notice a few things about this story. This is really important that we understand this. I want you to notice that pointing out this woman's sins did *not* lead her out of a lifestyle of sin. Did you see that? Judging her lifestyle did *not* change her lifestyle. Shaming her for what she did, did *not* set her free from her painful past. What was it that changed her? An invitation to know the Son of God, to experience his grace, his goodness, his love, and his freedom, because you have to understand this, Jesus didn't come for the healthy. Jesus came for the sick. Jesus did not come for the self-proclaimed righteous, Jesus came for hurting, and broken, and repentant sinners. And Jesus said, "you're invited, come as you are, come now, come quickly, come and know my grace. It doesn't matter who you are, listen to me, if you've ever felt unwanted, and maybe you feel like you failed, you doubted God, or you questioned God, or maybe you feel like you been hurt by God, you're still invited. If you've let God down, if you've tried and failed and tried and failed again, you're still invited. Come to me if you feel ashamed. Come to me if you feel unworthy. Come to me with your doubts. Come to me with your addictions. Come to me with your hangups. Come to me with your baggage. Come to me with your past. Come to me with those things that other people don't like, and judge, just come to me. Come to me and I will give you rest. Come to me."

I told you about Joe and how he was almost turned away from church because of his clothes. Listen to me, come in as you are, where you are, come in with every kind of hangup,

doubt, insecurity, those things that hold you back, you just come to Jesus as you are. We're all equal at the foot of the cross. You come to Jesus. You're still invited. You're still invited, there's still room, come to Jesus, but listen to me: *when you come, don't come alone*.

3. Because you are invited, invite others.

Don't come alone. When you come to him, you invite others to know his grace, his goodness, to experience the mercy from heaven. Don't come alone. Don't ever come alone. Come to Jesus, but invite others to know him as you do.

Jesus told another story, this one was in Luke's gospel, Luke 14:15-24, and I won't read it but let me describe that passage to you: Jesus said there was a guy throwing a wedding banquet, a party, and Jesus said the guy invited a bunch of people to come but everybody had their excuses: "Well, we just bought some land," or "we are busy," or "we just can't go." In our world today it would be, "well I'm just so busy, I'm just so tired, well we got the big game this weekend, the kids have sports." All these people said we can't, we don't have time, we're just not interested. So the man in the story said, "listen, if they're not interested, you go out and you compel others to come. You show, you describe this party, you describe my love, you help them see what my kingdom, my family offers." He said, "compel the blind, the lame, and the crippled to come. If all those that everyone expects to be at my party don't care about the party, you invite the blind, the lame, and the crippled." Why does this matter? Because in the day when Jesus lived, if you were blind, or lame, or crippled, everyone just assumed you did something really, really bad and sinful to deserve that, and Jesus is saying, "Those that everyone else rejects are invited to my family. You compel the blind, you compel the lame, you compel the crippled, you compel those that everyone else despises, overlooks, or rejects, you compel them to come into my kingdom." Feel his love, sense his grace, let it draw you. There's still room; it doesn't matter who you are, doesn't matter how unworthy you feel, you are invited to the family of God. And bring someone with you.

Let's pray today. Holy Spirit would you draw people. Invite us into your family today.

As you reflect in prayer today, I wonder how many of you would say that I'm a faithful follower of Christ, but there might be one person in my life that I really love that doesn't know Jesus, or maybe you know several people. It could be your husband, it could be a child, it could be your dad, your mom. It could be someone that you work with, someone you went to school with, someone that you do life with that's not a follower of Christ, and you would want to pray that they would experience his grace today, would you lift up your hands right now, if you have someone in your life like that? Come on, have some faith today, have some faith today, and say, I'm believing for these people.

God we pray today that you would inspire us, as your family, to so fall in love with you and your kingdom, and your party, that we just compel people and show them what life and life abundantly is like, God, that you would draw people by the power of your Spirit. God I know that there may be those who will go and bring someone back to church next week or online to hear your invitation. God just make us a living letter, a living invitation, showing the grace, the beauty, the love, the transforming power of your risen Son Jesus, we pray

God, for those that we know and love that don't yet know you, God we won't judge their lifestyle, we will lead them to you, and let you heal, forgive sin, and make us new God, we all need your grace. Use us, God, to compel them to come in and experience your party, your family, your love.

As you keep praying today, some of you may sense "this is what I need. I felt unworthy, when it comes to God. I felt guilty about what I've done." You are invited. Who is Jesus? He is the Son of God; he was sinless and perfect in every way. He became the sacrifice for the forgiveness of our sins. He died on the cross in our place, and our God raised him from the dead, so that anyone, and this includes you, anyone who calls on the name that is above every name, the name of Jesus, anyone who calls on the name of Jesus would be saved, forgiven, transformed. It doesn't matter what you've done, doesn't matter how dark your life is, doesn't matter where you've been, doesn't matter the secrets that nobody else knows, when you come to him, he hears your prayers. He forgives your sins, he's calling you today, you are invited to the family of God. If you say I need his grace, I need his mercy, today as he invites, I accept the invitation, I turn from my old life, I turn toward him, I give my life to him – that's your prayer – I need his grace, I give my life to him, if that's your prayer, lift your hands high now, lift them up and say yes, that's my prayer. Lift up your hands and say yes Jesus.

It would mean so much if all of us would stand to our feet together, in honor of those today choosing Jesus, responding to his invitation, we're all going pray together, nobody prays alone, would you just pray aloud, pray after me:

- Heavenly Father,
- forgive all of my sins.
- Change my heart.
- Accept me now.
- Jesus make me new.
- Fill me with your Spirit,
- so I can know you,
- and walk with you,
- and serve you,
- and compel others to know you.
- My life is not my own.
- I give it all to you.
- Thank you for new life.
- Because of Jesus,
- now you have mine.
- In Jesus name I pray. Amen.

Could we give God some praise today?

Benediction

> Go into this week knowing you have been accepted by God through Christ, living in his grace for you, and showing that grace to others and inviting them to church with you next week, that we all may enjoy being in God's family.

Life Group Questions
I'm In Part One: I'm Invited
Week of November 1, 2026

1. Everyone has a story. Describe your faith journey. How was it that you were invited? How did you come to know Christ?
2. When you came to faith in Christ, what did you experience or feel? Pick one word to describe what you experienced after you found faith in Christ.
3. Read Luke 7:37-39. What was it about Jesus that allowed the woman to approach Him so boldly?
4. Read Matthew 11:28-29. How does the rest and acceptance Jesus offers differ from what the world offers?
5. Share about a time when you felt rejected by people. What are some ways you can find acceptance in Christ?
6. Have you accepted God's invitation to be a part of His family? If not, prayerfully consider taking that step this week.
7. Talk about one person you're praying for to come to Christ. Have you invited them to church with you? What happened? If not, how might you do it, and what might happen if you did?
8. Pray for those you know and love who don't know Christ.