

THE JOURNEY: A Guide for Reflection

Invitation

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There are years that ask questions, and years that answer.

~ Zora Neale Hurston

As the passage between young adulthood and mid-life unfolded for me, an unplanned life event placed limitations on my time and resources, restricting the invitations I could accept. This time spent in the tenuous territory of change often meant having to say "no" or "maybe another time" to myself and others. Then, one autumn day, a series of realizations made it clear that I had reached a plateau --if not the summit-- of the personal Mount Everest I'd been climbing.

Determined to embrace life more fully, I resolved to say an enthusiastic "YES!" to opportunities whenever possible, and to extend more invitations to others. While initially uncomfortable, this shift soon came more easily and led to a sense of flourishing as my life became more balanced, joyful and connected. Interestingly, the one invitation I chose to decline, breaking my nearly year-long streak of "yes", came after a chance encounter with a flight instructor who tried to persuade me to enroll in training for a private pilot's license. It turns out, not every invitation can be met with a "yes!"

Life routinely presents us with a more complex landscape than the limited experience I've described here. We oscillate between longing for an invitation that never arrives and having to choose between equally enticing, yet conflicting, opportunities. We understandably dread obligatory gatherings with those whose views challenge or own, or whose beliefs may be harmful. And sometimes, there's a natural tension between the initial excitement of being included and growing misgivings at the prospect of attending as an event approaches.

This month, we encourage you to reflect on what "invitation" has meant in different seasons of your life and what it means today. Whether you engage with this resource as a member of one of our monthly Journey Groups or use it for personal inspiration and centering, we hope you'll spend some time with the quotations that follow. Look for the one that speaks to you, ponder why it resonates, and reflect on the journey it invites you to take.

In faith and love,

Angela

Questions to Live With



Photo by Jennie Razumnaya on Unsplash

1. When were you “the stranger” and someone invited you in? More importantly, how are you repaying that gift in your living and loving today?
2. What are you doing with the invitation to love yourself?
3. How are you handling Life’s invitation to live gracefully and even gratefully with uncertainty and change?
4. Have you grown more from what you’ve invited into your life or what you’ve disinvited from your life?
5. What question do you need to invite into your life in order to enter the next phase of your becoming?
6. If these questions don’t address how you need to explore invitation this month, what is your question?

For Inspiration

Enter, Rejoice and Come In

Enter, rejoice, and come in.
Enter, rejoice, and come in.
Today will be a joyful day;
enter, rejoice, and come in.

Singing the Living Tradition, #361

A real conversation always contains an invitation. You are inviting another person to reveal [themselves] to you, to tell you who they are or what they want.

– David Whyte

There is a love that sets us free. Not free as in having the power to do whatever we want, but free as in not weighed down or bound by the patterns of hatred and control that get passed from generation to generation... Free as in knowing without a doubt that we are worthy and that it is ours to invite others into that same wisdom for themselves.

- Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt

Sabbath observance invites us to stop... It asks us to notice that while we rest, the world continues without our help.

- Wendell Berry

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I invite you to get out of the box, be yourself. If you have blue hair, pink, yellow; if you have a broken tooth; if you have other sexual preferences... be yourself. Fight for your happiness always.

- J Balvin

Change is not a threat to your life, but an invitation to live.

- Adrienne Rich

The Arabs used to say,
When a stranger appears at your door,
feed him for three days
before asking who he is,
where he's come from,
where he's headed.

That way, he'll have strength
enough to answer.

Or, by then you'll be such good friends
you don't care...

- Naomi Shihab Nye

There is only one invitation it would kill me to refuse, yet I'm tempted to turn it down all the time. I get the invitation every morning when I wake up to actually live a life of complete engagement ... to actually live, to fully participate in this amazing life for one more day...

Turning down this invitation comes in lots of flavors. It looks like numbing yourself or distracting yourself or seeing something really beautiful as normal. It can also look like refusing to forgive or not being grateful or getting wrapped around the axle with fear or envy. I think every day God sends us an invitation to live and sometimes we forget to show up or get head-faked into thinking we haven't really been invited. But you see, we have been invited -- every day, all over again

- Bob Goff

Nothing inspires cleanliness like an unexpected guest.

- Radhika Mundra

In an authentic community, citizens decide anew every single time whether to show up.

- Peter Block



Credit: *The Dinner Party Project*

The speech of others constitutes so many invitations to look and see what there is to be seen, so many invitations to enrich one's own experience of things.

- Chad Engelland

True hospitality is when someone leaves your home feeling better about themselves, not better about you.

- Shauna Niequist

I'm different, and my manner invites questions. I'm never afraid to answer.

- Marlee Matlin

If I wait for someone else to validate my existence, it will mean that I'm shortchanging myself.

- Zanele Muholi

Let's invite one another in. Maybe then we can begin to fear less, to make fewer wrong assumptions, to let go of the biases and stereotypes that unnecessarily divide us. Maybe we can better embrace the ways we are the same. It's not about being perfect. It's not about where you get yourself in the end. There's power in allowing yourself to be known and heard, in owning your unique story, in using your authentic voice. And there's grace in being willing to know and hear others. This, for me, is how we become.

- Michelle Obama

We say yes to every invite, and then we feel tired and anxious and stressed and overworked and burnt out.

- Jay Shetty

Blessed be the mind that dreamed the day
The blueprint of your life
Would begin to glow on earth,
Illuminating all the faces and voices
That would arrive to invite
Your soul to growth.

- John O'Donohue

Teachings come from everywhere when you open yourself to them. That's the trick of it really, to open yourself to everything and everything opens itself to you.

- Richard Wagamese

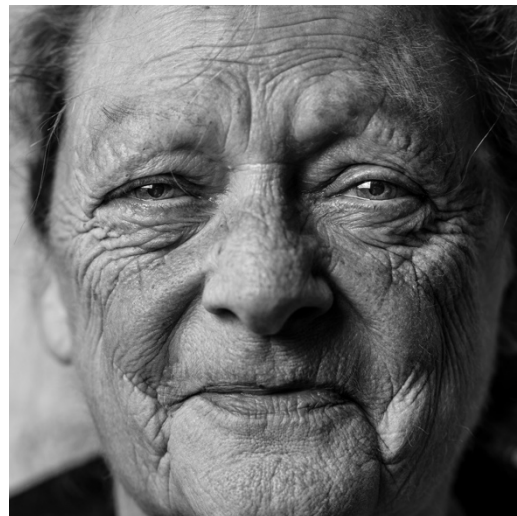


Photo by Glen Hodson on Unsplash

The house I was born in in Somalia was right next to a big market. A lot of beggars and panhandlers would be in front of our house constantly, and my grandfather and grandmother would always invite them in to have food with us and have them take whatever was left over.

- Iihan Omar

“Invitation”

If you are a dreamer, come in.
If you are a dreamer, a wisher, a liar,
A hope-er, a pray-er, a magic bean buyer.
If you're a pretender, come sit by my fire,
For we have some flax golden tales to
spin. Come in!
Come in!

- Shel Silverstein

I want to encounter roles that break the
shell and invite me into a new world.

- Jeon Yeo-been



Photo by Samatha Hare on Unsplash

Optional Spiritual Exercises

Option A: The Invitation that Isn't Easy For Us

You likely saw this one coming. When the monthly theme is invitation, inviting someone to join you online or in person at First U seems an obvious exercise. What may not be obvious is the additional invitation to share with your invitee how our congregation makes a difference in your life. This is where all of us understandably struggle. Sharing why this gathered community matters to us can feel uncomfortably close to the pushy proselytizing we want nothing to do with. But sharing how this spiritual tradition has given you a gift is quite different from trying to convince someone that your religion is the only right way. It might feel a bit awkward, but it may be as simple as saying something like “Hey, you mentioned that you're feeling a hunger for community lately and I found that in the people at First U, so I was wondering if you want to come with me or log on to zoom sometime to check it out.”

Navigating your way through these complex and uncomfortable waters is what this exercise is all about. It's not just about inviting someone to check it out; it's about digging deeper into why that's not just something you naturally and always do. It's not just about fighting through the discomfort of telling someone why you love this congregation and why they may love it too; it's about figuring out why that discomfort is there in the first place. And it's not just about figuring all this out; it's about opening to the possibility that you might be able to share something valuable, even life-changing, with a friend.

Option B: What Matters is Being Invited

In her short story, “Invitations,” American-born Canadian author Carol Shields encourages us to reflect on the following: “*What mattered was that she had been invited.*” [As you view the 10-minute story \(or read the transcript\)](#), ponder what you would do if you were the protagonist. Then invite someone in your life to do something that neither of you are that fond of. Come to your group prepared to share your experience of what happened. (How was your invitation received? Did you end up doing something together? Did you learn anything new about yourself or the other person?)

Join Us

Join a Journey Group

Journey Groups are a great way to go deeper with our monthly theme by sharing with small group of people for a couple of hours each month. Groups meet online on Zoom and are scheduled at different times during the month.

For more information, visit our website firstunitariantoronto.org/journey-groups/ or look for the link in *First Light*. Registration for the 2023-24 congregational year is expected to open in early October.

Upcoming Themes

October – Trust | November – Healing | December – Awe | January – Story
February – Wintering | March – Power | April – Emotional Intelligence | May – Activism

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