

Invitations are the **stuff of life**.

Invitations are at the **core** of all our relationships.

Whether it's **giving** them or **accepting** them

Receiving them or **rejecting** them

Invitations define our **relationship** with *others*

Invitations define our **relationship** with *God*

What kind of person are you towards **invitations**?

How do you respond to the personal **advances** of another?

When you **receive** an invitation what's the **first thing** you do with it?

Maybe you **immediately** look for a way to **get out of it**?

"I'm sorry, I can't make it my lawn needs mowing!"

"I'm sorry, I've got an appointment with my Television"

Maybe you keep it up your **sleeve**?

You know, in case you get a **better offer** later!

"I'd like to come your party but I'm not quite sure what I'm doing yet".

"Yep, I'll come - but I mightn't be able to make it."

Or maybe you **just say "No"**

No matter **what** the invitation. No matter **who** it's from.

At least the answer from you is always **consistent**.

*Thanks, but **no** thanks.*

Invitations are always an offer towards **friendship**

Invitations are always a request for **intimacy** and **companionship**

No matter **what** the invitation...

Whether it's to a **birthday party** or to **attend a wedding**

Whether it's to **join a local committee** or to go **out for dinner**

Whether it's a **marriage proposal** or for a **cuppa tea & a bickie**

Invitations are always a **movement** from one person **towards** another.

And what I want to know is: **what do you do with them?**

Gina McMillan's life was filled with **invitations**
And usually she was the one **extending** them to others

Of course, she **received** them too
Very **rarely** did **Gina** turn many invitations down!

But she was **forever** extending them to others
Forever inviting you **somewhere** to do **something**

Maybe you were even **fortunate** enough to have received one?
Oh, they were rarely **formal**
Seldom where they **ceremonial**

But they were always **warm**.
Weren't they?

Always **personal**. Always... **inviting**

Gina's life was one big **extended invitation**

She **invited** us to **know** her.
She **welcomed** us **into** her life.
And she **loved** it whenever we **showed up**.

The Bible reading from **Song of Songs** is all about an **invitation**
It's all about a **movement** from one person **towards** another

Song of Songs is a request for **intimacy** and **companionship**
It's an offer from **our lover** to **move closer** towards **us**

In the most **intimate** of language
Poetry – the *universal language of lovers*

Song of Songs expresses the desire of a **lover** towards his **beloved**

It's an invitation towards **deep intimacy**
An invitation towards **knowing** and **being known**
An invitation to **leave everything behind** and to be **deeply loved**

Like two **fully charged** Teenagers

The **Lover** and his **Beloved** can't wait to get their hands on each other

When you're **in love** anything that **separates** you

Is viewed as an **insurmountable obstacle**

These two have been **apart** for **far too long!**

They can't **wait** any longer to be together!

Listen as the Lover speaks to his Beloved

“Arise, my darling, my beautiful one, and come with me. See! The winter is past; the rains are over and gone. Flowers appear on the earth; the season of singing has come, the cooing of doves is heard in our land. The fig tree forms its early fruit; the blossoming vines spread their fragrance. Arise, come, my darling; my beautiful one, come with me.”

The **Lover** is issuing his **Beloved** an **invitation**

And it's an **invitation** towards **intimate discovery**

He **beckons** her

*“Arise, my darling, my beautiful one, and **come** with me”*

You see the time for them **being apart** is **over**.

The **cold winter** has **finally past!**

So the **Lover** extends his **invitation** to **discover** life with him

*Arise, my darling, my beautiful one, and come with me. **See!** The winter is past*

The **long** and **lonely** nights of being **alone** have **finished!**

Now they can **finally** be together!

The rains that **separated** them are **over** and **gone!**

Now they can explore **together!**

Now they can explore **each other!**

They're now **free** to **live** and to **love**

Without any further **restraints** or **impediments**

No longer with **separation** between them

Finally the winter has **past!**

And **now** new life begins **together!**

The **Spring** has come!
And it's the **season** for **Love** - the **season** for **Lovers**

Flowers are now **in bloom** everywhere
This is the season for **celebration** and **rejoicing**

“Arise, my darling”

The turtledoves are **cooing**
They've found their **partners** and they **sing** together
You can **hear** them everywhere!

“Come with me and see!”

The **fig tree** is starting to bear its **first fruits**
And the **perfume** of the vines is **overwhelmingly enchanting**

Everything is **delightful!**
And so are you *my **darling**, my **beautiful one***

Everything else is starting **anew**
Come my darling *let's start life **anew together***

But **despite** all the things the **Lover** sees around him
Despite all the things that **arrest** the **Lover's** senses

The **Lover's** only interested in **one thing!**
What **captivate** him are the **sights** and **sounds** of his **beloved!**

Look again at the passage with me.

Show me your face, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely.

The **Lover** hears the turtledoves **cooing**
But their singing is but **noise** compared to his **Beloved's** sweet voice

The **Flowers** are all **blooming**
And the **fig tree** is bearing its **first fruits**

But their **beautiful form** can't **compare** with hers.
*She alone is **lovely!***

Seems like a **strange thing** to talk about a **funeral**. *Doesn't it?*
Even seems like a **strange thing** to hear in the **Bible**.

Sounds like something you'd hear at a **wedding** not at a **funeral!**
*"Maybe Mike grabbed the **wrong sermon** on his way out the door?"*

I **assure** you that I **didn't!**
But you're right it's a **strange thing** to talk about at a **funeral!**

Love. Lovers. New Life.
An **invitation** to move towards us for **deeper intimacy**

Can I suggest that it **feels strange** to many of us?
Because many of us actually have **strange views** about God!

We wouldn't **expect** to hear *this kind of stuff* in the Bible
Because the **reality** is, many of us **haven't** actually **read it!**

Gina read it. She heard the **voice** of God.

Gina heard God **speaking intimately** with her
Gina accepted God's **invitation**

God **invited** Gina to **know** him.
And Gina **welcomed** God **into** her life.
God **loved** it whenever Gina **showed up!**

And now Gina's **gone** to be with her **Lover**
Gina's **Lover** is God himself.

Listen again as Gina's Lover beckons her

"Arise, my darling, my beautiful one, and come with me. See! The winter is past; the rains are over and gone. Flowers appear on the earth; the season of singing has come, the cooing of doves is heard in our land. The fig tree forms its early fruit; the blossoming vines spread their fragrance. Arise, come, my darling; my beautiful one, come with me."

My **friends**, for Gina, the **winter** has **past!**
The **rains** are **over** and **gone**

All the **obstacles** separating **these two lovers** are now **removed!**

Gina is living in **newness** of life with her **God**, with her **Lover**.
Gina is able to **know** God as she is **fully known** by him

New life has now began!
The season of **singing** has finally arrived!

“Arise, come, my darling Gina, my beautiful one, come with me”

But what about you?

What will you **do** with God’s **invitation**?
How will you **respond** to voice of your **Lover**?

You see, friends, **no matter** how you **view** God right now
No matter how many **strange ideas** you’ve come up with about him!

God **views** you as his **Beloved**!
He **wants** you to **love** him!
He desperately **wants** you to be **loved** by him!

Love like you’ve **never known**
Deep **intimacy** like you’ve **never experienced**

God has removed every **insurmountable obstacle** between us
At the **Cross** of Christ, God **dealt** with all our **sin**

Nothing in all creation is able to **separate** us from the **love** of God
Except **one thing... And that’s you!**

Stop playing **hard to get!**
God’s been **pursuing** you **long enough**.

“Come to him!” Don’t keep him **waiting** any longer!
Accept God’s **intimate movement** towards you

Listen even **now** in your **grief & tears** your **Lover** calls for you!

Even now Jesus is beckoning you to come...

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.