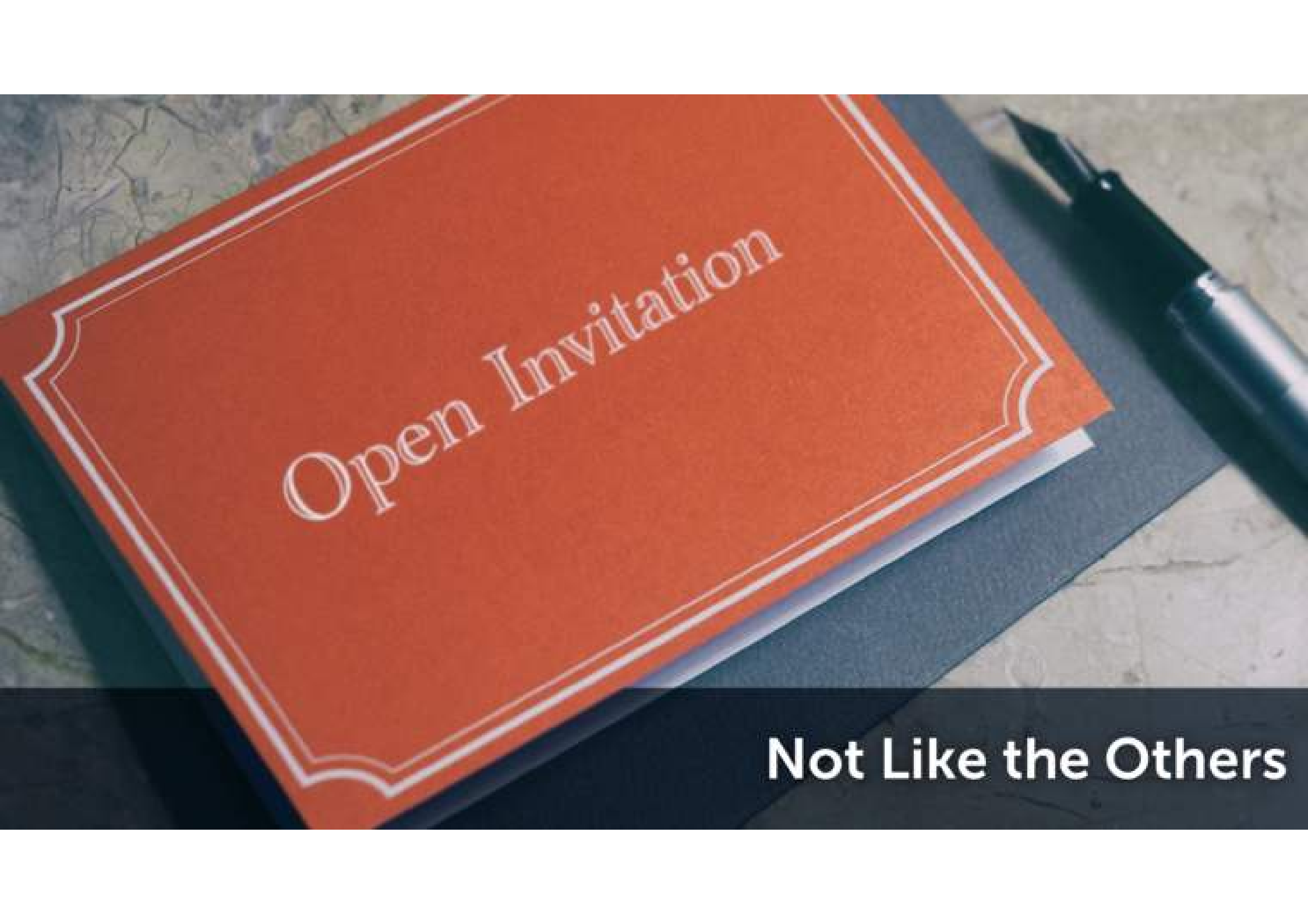


An orange envelope with the words "Open Invitation" printed in a white, serif font. The envelope is placed on a dark grey surface, and a black fountain pen is visible in the upper right corner. The background is a light-colored, textured surface.

Open Invitation

Not Like the Others

⁹ To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: ¹⁰ "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'

¹³ "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' ¹⁴ "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

"To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable."

The two men in the parable—a Pharisee and a tax collector—were so vastly different in the religious and social world of their day, it's hard to overstate the contrast.



“Two men went to the church to pray; one a devoted and well-respected religious leader, and the other a predatory and corrupt debt collector.”

As different as these two men are, they still come to the same temple to pray.



The Pharisee "stood by himself."

The tax collector "stood at a distance."



The content of the prayer of the Pharisee includes pride, self-righteousness, and judgment of others disguised as gratitude.

Vindicate me, Lord, for I have led a blameless life... I do not sit with the deceitful, nor do I associate with hypocrites. I abhor the assembly of evildoers and refuse to sit with the wicked. I wash my hands in innocence, and go about your altar, Lord... I lead a blameless life; deliver me and be merciful to me... Do not take away my soul along with sinners, my life with those who are bloodthirsty, in whose hands are wicked schemes, whose right hands are full of bribes.

I have trusted in the Lord and have not faltered. Test me, Lord, and try me, examine my heart and my mind; for I have always been mindful of your unfailing love and have lived in reliance on your faithfulness... My feet stand on level ground; in the great congregation I will praise the Lord.

"God, I thank you..."

"God, I thank you..."

"that I am not like other people..."

"God, I thank you..."

"that I am not like other people..."

"robbers, evildoers, adulterers..."

"God, I thank you..."

"that I am not like other people..."

"robbers, evildoers, adulterers..."

"or even like this tax collector."

"God, I thank you..."

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"robbers, evildoers, adulterers..."

"or even like this tax collector."

"I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get."

With both fasting and tithing, he is making the point that he's not just obedient, but "above and beyond" obedient.



“What is striking is that the Pharisee’s prayer begins like a thanksgiving psalm, but never enumerates the divine actions for which one is thankful. For God’s acts, the Pharisee has substituted his own.”

(Joel B. Green)

"God, have mercy on me..."

"God, have mercy on me..."

"a sinner."

"God, have mercy on me..."

"a sinner."

This man makes no attempt to justify himself with a list of religious accomplishments.

If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless. But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.

What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.

The biggest shock for Jesus' listeners comes at the end: it was the tax collector who walked away "justified" from the temple, not the Pharisee.

"All those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

“All those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up. (James 4:10)

“All those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up. (James 4:10)

Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. (1 Peter 5:6)

“Luke’s purpose is not to condemn a particular group but to warn against a particular way of conducting oneself in light of the present and impending reign of God.”

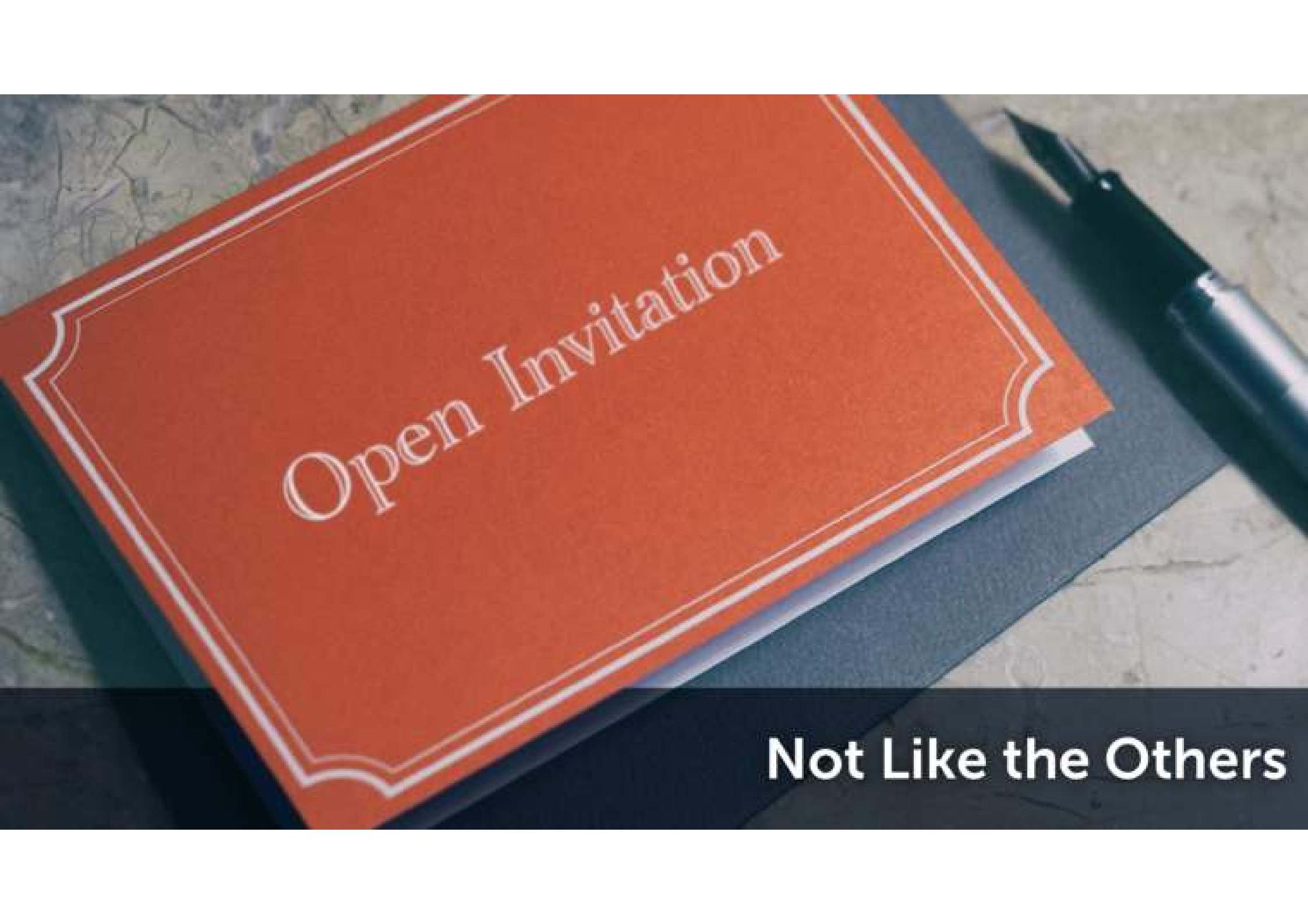
(Joel B. Green)

How comfortable are you sharing a space of worship and prayer with someone vastly different from you, someone you might even consider offensive or out-of-place?

Where have you quietly ranked your own sin as somewhere in the middle—worse than nothing, but safely below the “real” sinners?

Take a moment to pray the tax collector's prayer ("God, have mercy on me, the sinner") and let it rest not on your effort or accomplishment, but on what it cost to secure it.

Invite the Spirit to flip your life upside-down this week
—to bring you an awareness of moments to think,
speak, and act with humility instead of self-promotion.

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