

Practical Strategies to Engage and Reengage the Spiritually Open This Easter



EASTER OUTREACH TOOLKIT

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What's Inside

A Plan to Reach The Spiritually Open This Easter

Welcome to the Easter Outreach Toolkit!

In this toolkit, you'll find:

Part 1

New research from the Barna Group demonstrating an openness to the Gospel.

Part 2

Discussion questions and next steps.

Part 3

A step-by-step outreach and follow-up plan for new and returning guests.

Part 4

Three Easter sermon series outlines, including one complete series outline with transcripts, graphics, and small group questions.

Part 1: Understanding the Research

People Are More Open Than You Think

Despite the decline in church attendance many congregations have experienced over the last few decades, there's some good news emerging from recent Barna research. In this section, we'll cover how to position yourself to leverage the rising curiosity young adults in America have about spirituality.

More than any other adults, Gen Z believes there's a supernatural or spiritual side to life, but doesn't believe that any one faith system works for them.

80% of Americans Believe in a Spiritual or Supernatural Dimension to Life

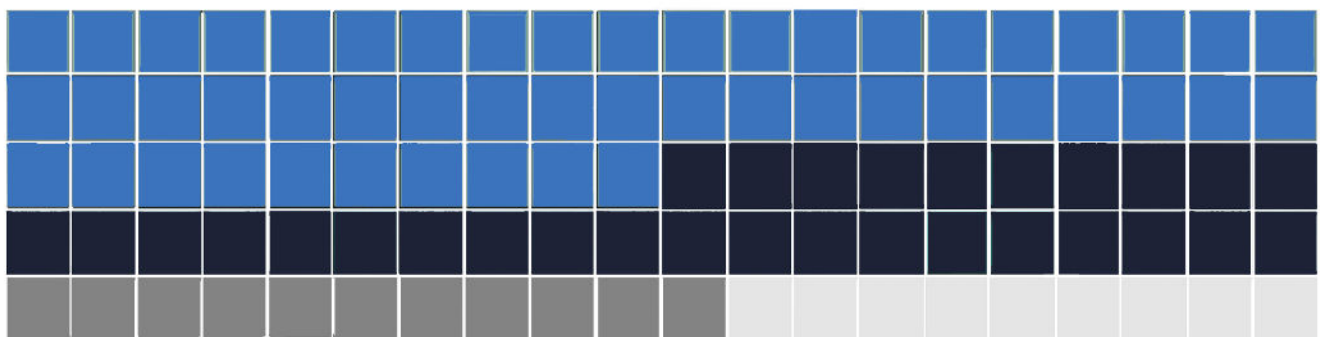
Just because church attendance has declined doesn't mean that Americans are becoming atheists in droves.

50% of Americans say they are certain that there is a spiritual or supernatural dimension to life, and 30% think it exists but aren't certain. Only 9% say they are certain there is no spiritual dimension to life, and 11% don't think so but are open to the possibility of it.

That means 91% of Americans would be at least open to the possibility of the resurrection of Jesus or at least would not categorically dismiss it.

AMERICANS ARE OPEN TO SPIRITUALITY

Do you think there is a spiritual or supernatural dimension to the world, or do you not think this?



n=2,000 U.S. adults, collected October 21 - 31, 2022. | SOURCE: Barna Group

Americans Would Like To Grow Spiritually

Another surprise is that 77% believe in God or a higher power, and 74% of Americans would like to grow spiritually.

That statistic bears repeating: 74% of Americans would like to grow spiritually. Obviously, that includes a swath of people who don't attend church.

Conclusion? Most of your unchurched neighbors are spiritually open and want to grow spiritually.

SPIRITUAL OPENNESS IS WIDESPREAD

77%

Believe in God or a higher power.

74%

I would like to grow spiritually.

44%

I am more open to God today than before the pandemic.

n=2,000 U.S. adults, collected October 21 - 31, 2022. | SOURCE: Barna Group

Gen Z and Millennials Are Especially Open

The best (and most surprising news) is that Gen Z and Millennials—people born between 1984 and 2015—are more likely to believe in a supernatural component to life than their boomer parents and grandparents.

59% of Gen Z say they are more open to spirituality now than before the pandemic. Only 34% of Boomers are more spiritually open.

RISING SPIRITUAL HUNGER

● Gen Z ● Millennials ● Gen X ● Boomers



Certain or think a spiritual dimension exists.

n=2,000 U.S. adults, collected October 21 - 31, 2022. | SOURCE: Barna Group

RISING SPIRITUAL HUNGER

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“I am more open to God today than I was before the pandemic”.

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What Does This Mean?

People are Curious, They Just Don't Think the Church Can Help

So what does this mean? The combination of high spiritual openness and overall declining church attendance (which is composed of unchurched and de-churched people) means **people are still very spiritually curious and open to the supernatural, they just don't think the church can help.**

Consider Gen Z in particular. They are [deconstructing the faith of their youth more than any other generation](#), yet remain open to the possibility of faith.

While it's easy to grow disheartened reading statistics like that, as you've seen above, Gen Z is the most spiritually open generation alive today.

This is a perfect opportunity for you to position your church alongside the spiritually open and let them know that you can answer the questions they're asking.

If you're up to the challenge, then here's some further guidance on how you can approach this Easter by leaning into the high level of spiritual openness of people who are currently not attending church.

Reaching People Isn't About Watering Down the Gospel

Contrary to what many church leaders who aren't reaching people have argued, preaching to unchurched people is not about watering down content, preaching 'baby' sermons, or avoiding hard subjects.

It's really all about the angle you take on a subject.

The problem with most message series is that they are focused on what the speaker wants to say, not what the listener wants or needs to hear. If you only want to ever reach Christians, that's a great strategy.

If you want to engage unchurched people, in my view, it's a terrible strategy.

Instead, frame what people NEED to know within the context of what they WANT to know.

What people want to know can easily drive a topical series on issues like suffering, relationships, and even creating a better life. But then there's what people need to know, like specific teachings, doctrines, and sections of scripture.

That's where the angle becomes everything. For example, in the Easter series included with the Easter Toolkit, I preached a sermon that tackled the question of Scriptural accuracy and the historic reliability of the Bible. That's definitely what people need to hear, but I promise you very few hungover unchurched people woke up this morning wondering about the textual accuracy of the Gospel of Mark or the process of canonization.

However, the spiritually curious definitely ask questions about whether the Christian bible can be trusted, so the angle on the historical accuracy and reliability of the scriptures is titled "I Can't Believe in a God... Who Picked a Faulty Bible to Communicate With Us." An angle like that engages the 'thought bubble' of someone skeptical of Christianity.

Here are a few more guidelines on crafting a message series that will engage people at Easter and beyond it.

1. Answer Questions People Are Actually Asking

To drill down a little more on angling a sermon series, it's a good idea to answer questions people are actually asking.

People ask questions about life, faith, culture, and almost every conceivable subject every day. If you look at the three series included in the Easter Tool Kit, all three series are angled to address a problem the average listener is facing in language they would understand:

- **I Can't Believe in a God Who....**
- **Little Faith, Big God**
- **What Happens When You Die**

The most ambiguous one is "I Can't Believe in a God Who...", but when you pair it with its weekly subjects you come up with titles like I Can't Believe in a God Who Would Let People Go To Hell or I Can't Believe in a God Who Kills Innocent Children In the Old Testament. The titles are shocking because most people have a) had that thought and b) can't believe a church is 'going there.'

But that's the power of answering questions people are actually asking.

2. Focus On People Issues

When preaching to unchurched people, you want to pepper your messages with what we might call ‘people issues.’ It’s easy to think that church and unchurched people have vastly different questions about faith and life, but that’s not necessarily true.

Church and unchurched people struggle with pretty much the same things. They have relational issues, financial issues, personal doubts, health concerns, and insecurities. They feel like God is more distant than he needs to be. They struggle at work. And when they’re incredibly successful, they struggle with thinking there has to be something more. When you connect on those issues, you connect with everyone. Christian and otherwise.

3. Title and Position Your Message With An Invitation In Mind

It’s one thing to get hyper-specific in your series angles and approaches to your weekend services.

To call a series “The Role of the Tabernacle in Israelite Life”—as fascinating as that might be to a Biblical scholar—can make a series seem like a college lecture everyone wants to skip.

On the other hand, if you title your series in a hyper-relatable way (For example, “5 Signs You’re an Emotional Disaster”), you have to ask how on earth is someone who attends your church going to invite his friend to it?

Our church recently did a series on the spiritual connection to mental health called “When You’re Not Okay.” Still specific, but much easier to invite your friends to.

4. Spend Some Time With Gen Z and Younger Millennials

Some final ways to get ready to preach to truly unchurched people is to read what they read and get around people under the age of 30.

Both practices can break you out of the bubble it’s so easy to get into as preachers—commentaries, message prep etc. Picking up a book or two that deconstructs Christianity or offers an atheist or agnostic point of view can help you understand the objections and arguments people watching and listening to your message will have in mind as they listen to you, and you can counter them.

A final practice (that I love) is to convene a focus group of people under 30 to discuss topics as you create a message series. Ideally, you’d have church and unchurched young adults in the room. Since it’s probably been a decade or two since most preachers were in their twenties, it can be a great reminder of how much culture has changed, the issues people are actually wrestling with, and the language they use to describe their problems.

Part 2: Discussion Questions and Next Steps

Discussion Questions

1. According to the Barna research, what percentage of Americans believe in a spiritual or supernatural dimension to life, and what does this mean for churches?

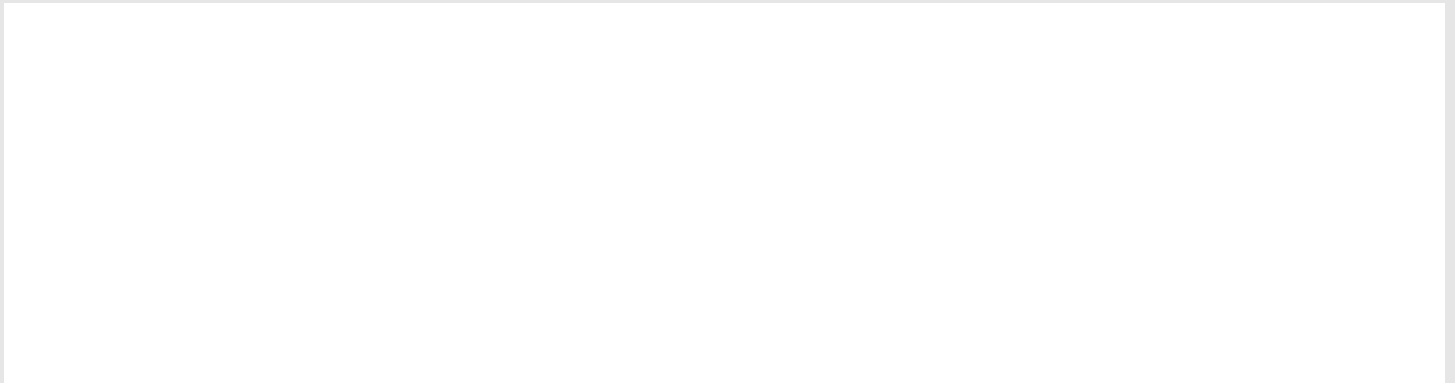
2. What do Gen Z and Millennials believe about spirituality, and how can churches leverage this for Easter? Discuss this data in light of trends and conversations you've had with young adults in your own community.

3. Think back to your last five to ten years of Easter weekend sermons and series. Which connected most deeply and led to growth? Why?

4. What 'people issues' can you address this Easter? Make a list, and then narrow it to a few that you can engage more deeply during the series.



5. What are the strengths and weaknesses of your follow-up system for guests? What changes will you make before Easter?



6. In what other ways can churches build trust with people who are spiritually open but hesitant to attend church? Brainstorm some possible answers.



Next Steps

1. Pray! As much as this guide is focused on strategy, everything we do in the church should be undergirded with prayer.
2. Let a group of younger adults (Millennials and Gen Z) preview your weekend sermon and give them the freedom to provide feedback and suggest changes.
3. Similarly, test the title of your series and message titles before you commit to them.
4. Take time to assemble your most emotionally intelligent people in key positions on the parking lot and guest services teams!
5. Assemble the team you'll need ahead of time to design and print invitations, write the emails/text messages you'll send, and complete your follow up sequence.

Part 3: A Step-By-Step Outreach and Follow-Up Plan

Before Easter

1. Plan to begin a sermon series on Easter Sunday instead of finishing one. This signals to people that they joined you at the start of something important and are invited to come back.
2. Design that series with the spiritually open and guests in mind. I've included series ideas for you in this toolkit. Don't use insider language or assume everyone knows the story of Easter. People don't. Don't be shallow, but don't lose people by being so insider-focused that new people can't follow what's happening.
3. Create physical and digital invitations for your members to hand out to friends, inviting them to Easter Services. During the three weeks before Easter, spend a few minutes each Sunday and via email explaining to your members how to invite their friends.

[Watch this short explainer video.](#)

4. Stock up on visitor welcome resources and gifts. Expect double to triple the normal number of visitors and have whatever you give out to new people on hand so you don't run out.
5. Ensure your follow-up system is rock solid. If you miss following up on every first-time guest, plug those holes now. Make sure your database and input system for new people is updated and ready to go. And that everyone on the team is clear about how to follow up and ready to spring into action immediately after Easter.
6. Assign your highest emotionally intelligent people on Guest Services and Parking Team. There are some people who just don't have the social skills to engage new people well. Make sure they aren't front and center on Easter Sunday. Find your most emotionally and relationally intelligent people and get them in the foyer. Consider this a great opportunity to upgrade your Guest Services team.



[Download ready to use Easter invitation templates here!](#)

7. Train your team on how to engage returning people, not just new people. This Easter, you'll have people who return after being gone for a year or more, thanks to COVID. Some keys:
 - Don't judge. Just welcome and smile. Be glad they came back.
 - No guilt trip or "Where were you???"
 - Make sure everyone is just glad to see them.

On Easter Weekend

1. Make your Sunday as 'typical' as possible without minimizing Easter. In other words, dress like you would on a normal Sunday. Same with music. Obviously, have your best musicians out and sing appropriate songs, but if you normally don't have a 48-piece orchestra, don't add one. Make it a great weekend, but you don't want to create such a disconnected experience that when people return the Sunday after Easter that they don't recognize you or your church. Celebrate. But be normal.
2. Have extra people on hand ready to input data (names, addresses, and next steps) on Sunday so you can start connecting with new people on Monday.

Immediately After Easter Sunday

For New People

1. Send them a follow-up email or text. Invite them to something beyond next Sunday. Every church is different but you could invite them to:
 - A reception for new guests
 - An orientation class/session for new people
 - A small group orientation session
2. Create a second-time follow-up sequence.
3. On Sunday morning for a few weeks post-Easter, acknowledge and welcome those who have started attending since Easter.
4. Continue to encourage people to take a step.
5. Encourage new people to bring friends with them.
6. Have invite cards on hand for new people to invite new people. New people invite new people into new experiences.



[Download sample follow-up templates now!](#)

For Returning Guests

1. Send an email inviting them to take a step (as appropriate) into:
 - Baptism
 - Small groups
 - Serving
 - Other ways to get engaged.
2. Assume because they've returned that they're ready to re-engage your ministry.



[Download sample follow-up templates now!](#)

Part 4: Series Outline, Graphics, and Transcripts

While I generally advise against preaching other people's sermons ([here are 5 reasons why](#)), we all learn from each other and there is (as many have said) nothing new under the sun.

To help you prepare for Easter, here is one done-for-you sermon series complete with outlines, transcripts, sermon backgrounds, social media graphics and small group discussion questions, as well as two series outlines you can use.

You can use these as:

- Prompts to create your own series
- Outlines to build off of
- A series you'll preach yourself

If you choose the third option and end up preaching the series as I wrote it, please let your audience know you didn't write it.

I don't care whether you give me credit by name, but for the sake of your integrity and charges of plagiarism (which is passing off someone else's work as your own) please let people know you borrowed the series or most of the ideas from a resource you purchased. I don't care whether you use my name (most of your audience won't know it anyway), but to have the integrity to say "this series I'm starting today was something that has been inspired by and informed by another preacher I admire" is at least a start.

When I've shared a series based on other peoples' work, I've always given credit by name (e.g. the ideas in this message are from Tim Keller's work in *The Reason for God*). Nobody respects you less for that. They respect you more.

With that said, here are the series for use. Hope they help you create an extraordinary Easter series for your church.



[Download sermon outlines, graphics, and transcripts to help you create your Easter series.](#)