

**THE ART OF**   
**REACHING**  
with Carey Nieuwhof and Mark Clark

By Carey Nieuwhof &  
Mark Clark

Get people passionate, engaged, and contributing to your mission  
without compromising God's message.

## The Art of Reaching

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods beyond twelve copies for the sole use of the leadership of the team of the specific organization which purchased the course, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law.

If you wish for more than one login to access course materials, you may purchase the Team Edition which allows access for up to five individuals..

Thank you for respecting intellectual property rights and copyright law. For permission requests beyond the terms of this license, please write to the publisher at the address below.

Carey Nieuwhof Communications Limited  
P.O. Box 160  
Oro-Medonte ON L0L 2X0  
[www.careynieuwhof.com](http://www.careynieuwhof.com)  
[hello@careynieuwhof.com](mailto:hello@careynieuwhof.com)

© 2021 Carey Nieuwhof Communications Limited. All rights reserved.

# CONTENTS

---

- 04** Introduction
- 06** Session 1: Profile of the Post-Christian West
- 20** Session 2: Why People Are Attending Church Less Often
- 29** Session 3: The Church Scattered & Mobilized
- 46** Session 4: The Church Gathered Part 1: Method and Message
- 59** Session 5: The Church Gathered Part 2: The Ministry
- 71** Session 6: Why Engagement is the New Attendance
- 82** Session 7: Shifting from Click to Connect
- 92** Session 8: A Better Model for Content Creation and Sharing
- 101** Session 9: Best Practice for First-Time, In-Person Guests
- 112** Conclusion



# Introduction

Welcome to *The Art of Reaching* course!

We're excited for you to begin this journey.

As a church leader, you're aware that culture is changing rapidly. We're seeing significant shifts in ideas, thinking, values, practices and behavior. And when it comes to reaching people with the Gospel, the strategies that used to work simply aren't as effective as they used to be.

That's why we created this course. To equip church leaders like you with the lessons, tools and strategies to reach a world that seems to be tuning you out.

We start by helping you understand the philosophical, theological and culture shifts that are occurring so that you can speak into them with clarity. Then, we give you tools and strategies for reaching more people both in-person and online.

When you apply what's inside the course, we're confident that you'll see a difference in the number of new, passionate, engaged and contributing people in your church.

Once again, we're so excited you're on this journey with us.

Let's dive in!



# Session 1

How are we going to reach a culture if we don't understand it? In order to impact it, we must first know it. That's what we're talking about in this session.

Sometimes in life, we simply misdiagnose a problem. Because of my insecurity, I ask my wife to sit very far away when I preach. She used to sit on the front row, and I felt like she made faces when I preached. I got too distracted. So I politely asked her to sit back in a dark corner when I speak!

But then I wondered, "Is this unhealthy? Is there something wrong with our marriage? Do I have a problem because I ask my wife to go away when I preach?"

Then I met James Houston, the founder of Regent College in British Columbia. He knew C. S. Lewis, Tolkien, and J. I. Packer back in the day. He's a 98-year-old legend. He told me about a church that he consulted. He said, "The Church was unhealthy. While the pastor preached, his wife sat on the front row. She took notes, doted on him, and said amen every two minutes. And that's when I realized there was a problem. These people are fake."

I replied, "Wait a minute. So is it okay that I ask my wife to sit in the back when I preach?" He said, "That's the best thing. That means there's security in your marriage."

As you can imagine, I felt relieved. See, I misdiagnosed a problem. And that's what we need to avoid when it comes to reaching people. To impact the post-Christian West, we need to understand it clearly.

As you know, the western world is changing quickly. What I want to do in this session is hone in on five shifts that are happening in our culture.

## **ONE: The Highest Good Is Now Individual Freedom And Happiness.**

We've moved away from the class struggles of the 1950's and 1960's. Politics used to be the biggest deal. Now the journey into self is the biggest deal. The highest priority has moved away from theology and philosophy, and toward psychology. These days, it's all about us.

Back in the day, the Bible set the standard on ethics, what people thought, how they behaved, and what they valued.

That's been replaced by experiences, desires, preferences, and feelings.

Take marriage, for example. A married person may say, "I am what I feel. And my feelings have changed for this person I've been married to for 10 years. That must mean that we should separate." Logic like this is why we've seen divorce rates grow to five times what it was 50 years ago.

When it comes to religion, people will say, "I believe in God, but I won't go to church. I'm not going to let the Church and an old-fashioned Bible tell me what to believe." See, self has been elevated over God. Culture tries to keep the good aspects of Christianity—things like morality, equality, and justice—while taking away its costs, commitments, and restraints.

I have a friend who fights for animals and the environment. She's also a sexually liberated atheist. She's basically like, "You can't tell me what to do with my body, but I can tell you what to do with the environment. You can't tell me not to sleep around, but I can tell you not to go to Sea World."

The contradiction is fascinating. No one wants morality thrown on them. But on social media, everyone is a moralist.

As church leaders, we have to be able to push against this trend and actually speak into it.

**TWO: Traditions, Regulations, And Social Ties That Restrict Freedom, Happiness, And Self-Expression Are Being Deconstructed Or Destroyed.**



To the general western person, religion is old-fashioned and useless. Many people basically believe that they can create their own religion. They're moving away from institutions, like churches, because they believe that all authority structures are bad. People just want to be themselves. That's one of the main things that we're trying to speak into as churches in the present reality.

### **The gospel is not only that Jesus is your Savior, it's also that He's your Lord.**

Meaning, this is about obedience. He not only gets to shape what you believe, He also gets to shape the way you live—your money, your sex life, how you treat your neighbors, etc. Jesus is saying, “I have a holistic call on your life.” You can't simply say, “I believe certain doctrines” and then handle money, your sex life, and your family life the same way as your neighbor. That's never how Christianity was pitched in the New Testament.

In the New Testament, the word disciple is used 269 times. Disciple is the paradigm of Christianity, and we have to get back to that. Our culture wants to move away from it. We want to be able to do whatever we want. But we must understand that Christianity isn't about victory, it's about obedience. We preach that you can be victorious in Christ, and of course that's true, but we leave out the fact that it's about an obedience to something that transcends you. This is where our self-fulfillment gets challenged.

### **In order to speak into this as a church, I think we need to embrace our own brokenness as leaders.**

We don't need to hide the mistakes we make.

I was at an Apple Store in downtown Vancouver. I waited in line forever. Finally, I walked up to the guy who worked there and said, “Hey, I need you to fix my phone.”

He looked at it, pulled up my file, and then replied, “I'm sorry, I can't fix your phone.” I said, “What are you talking about? What do you mean you can't fix my phone? .

I've been waiting in line forever, bro. You know what? Let me speak to a manager.” I was getting more and more visibly frustrated.

He looked at my phone for a few more minutes and then said, “Yeah, I can’t fix your phone, Pastor Mark. But I’m going to do whatever I can to help you out.” I said, “Oh, you know me?” He replied, “Yeah, I go to your church.”

If only he had led with that! “Hi, Pastor Mark, how are you?” I would’ve been a totally different cat in front of him. I would’ve treated him like gold!

But he didn’t lead with that. And I didn’t treat him like gold. Not even a little bit.

Now, here’s the thing. I tell my church that story. Why? Because I can’t be the hero of every sermon. And if I’m going to reach a culture that has shifted, I have to be able to walk with a limp.

### **Humility will actually draw people to Jesus in the post-Christian West.**

Because their ‘big thing’ is hypocrisy in the Church. They say, “The Church acts like it’s perfect and talks about all kinds of rules. But it’s full of hypocrisy.” You have to lead the Church to have a posture of humility that says, “We are all beggars looking for bread, and we’re going to help each other get it. We are so dependent on the grace of God that He’s the only way we can wake up in the morning.”

## **THREE: The World Will Get Better With Progress, Technology, And Education.**

The philosophy of our time is that we’re going to move on from the dumb idea of God and religion, and we’re going to get smarter. We’re going to solve our own problems as a culture, so all we need is education.

Here’s what we have to understand as we speak into this. In the 20th century, we saw 100 million people dead because of wars. Think of the catastrophic damage of World War I and II combined. Then we got to the end of the 20th century and came up with a terrifying philosophical conclusion; there’s no such thing as evil. We progressed massively in technology and education. Yet even after a hundred million are dead, the conclusion of the century was that there’s no such thing as evil. How dangerous is that? These kinds of messages that people have started to believe must be our wake-up call to recognize as the Church.

We have to understand what we're fighting. Our existential angst is being drowned out by cooking shows, smartphones, celebrity gossip, and things that are total nonsense. This is the perfect strategy of Satan. See, he doesn't care what distracts you. He just wants to distract you. Recently, I read that the biggest threat to your spiritual life is the device in your pocket. Your phone is the greatest danger to the culture that you live in.

In the western world, we've become so good at individualism. We're so smart and wealthy, and it has actually had a negative, adverse effect. This is the culture we're attempting to reach.

## **FOUR: Ethics Have Become Prioritized Around The Quest For Individual Freedom And Self-Expression.**

For example, as a culture, we've made sex and gender different things. This is one of the generational conversations that's happening right now. In order to reach the post-Christian West, we have to be able to enter graciously but knowledgeably into that conversation. As one writer said, "Sex is a bodily biological reality, and gender is how we give social expression to that reality." In our culture, we have separated those two things.

We have the lower level of science, which is objective, public, valid truth for everyone. And then we have the upper level, which are morally private, subjective feelings. As a culture, we've basically said that what used to matter 50 years ago is the lower level. We've made the upper level more important. These days, what matters is your truth.

Not only have we separated sex and gender, we've separated body from person. People are asking, "What exactly is a person?" For example, when you enter into the abortion debate, there's an idea that you can have a human but not a person. See, that's the duality. You have a body, and then you have personhood, but those two will never touch or interact with each other. They are different realms. So our question is, "How do we speak a biblical worldview into the culture in a persuasive and winsome way?"

## **FIVE: There Are Forms Of External Authority That Need To Be Rejected, And Personal Authenticity Is Celebrated As The Ultimate Thing.**

What we have now is the gospel of life advancement and life enhancement. It's about how you get a better you. See, for the first time in history, the Church—even among Christians—is used as a tool of personal fulfillment. Rather than saying, “I'm part of a church for the good of society or for the good of others,” people select churches based on their own personal fulfillment.

Lesslie Newbigin made this very important point years ago, “I want to reject the idea that the West is becoming a secular society without God. Here's what it's becoming. Rather, a pagan society filled with idols and false gods.” Those are different things, and you have to realize that you're not necessarily speaking into a secularized culture that doesn't believe in God. Instead, you're speaking into a pagan society filled with all kinds of idols and false gods. Things like money, sex, power, family, comfort, or beauty. Those are the things that people are trusting to feel like they have their salvation. They're asking, “What's the thing that's going to get me up in the morning? What's the thing that's going to give me joy? It's my beauty, it's my family, it's my reputation, it's my work, or it's a relationship.”

**What we're doing as the Church is trying to deconstruct those idols from their hearts and replace them with Jesus.**

We're saying, “Some of you may have those classically liberal idols like money, sex, and power. You need to be careful. But there are also conservative idols like family and comfort.”

People ask me all the time, “How could family possibly be an idol in someone's life?” Well, think about it this way. I had a guy in my church. God woke him up at 2:00 in the morning and said, “I know you have a perfect house, perfect family, and perfect job. Here's what I want you to do. I want you to sell your house, pull your girls out of school, and I want you to go to the airport. Then I'll tell you where you need to go.” So he sells his house in Vancouver, which was very expensive at the time, pulls his girls out of school, goes to the airport, and works out with the Lord where he's supposed to go to. He goes and serves in one of the poorer third world countries on a work visa. After six months, his work visa ran out, so he came back home.

Who do you think are the people who told him that it was a dumb idea? Who do you think are the people who told him that he shouldn't go? His family. The people closest to him.

Sometimes the people who are closest to us are the people who make us unable to hear the voice of Jesus. In those moments, comfort and family become idols. This is why, when Jesus asked a man to follow Him, and the man asked if he could first go and bury his father, Jesus responded this way...

*Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:60 NIV).*

Jesus is like, "You don't get this. You have to hate your mother and father. You have to love them less and actually follow Me." That's what it means to challenge an idol. People have filled their lives with idols and false gods, and our job is to deconstruct those gods and reconstruct a better way.

Another thing that we have to recognize is that attitudes toward the Church have changed. These days, the Church is viewed as anti-gay, judgmental, and hypocritical. Those are probably the top three things that the outside, post-Christian world looks at the Church and says. The Church has to be able to speak into these things.

How people engage in church is another thing that has changed in the post-Christian West. A recent study reported that 20% of people who actually go to church, go alone. Think about that. How does that affect the way you do ministry?

There's been a digital revolution. There's been a porn revolution. A study showed that people are on their phones or devices 40 hours a week. There's a device addiction. What are you doing as the Church to meet people where they are and bring them the message of the gospel?

See, attitudes toward God have even changed in our culture. A few years ago, there was an article in *The Atlantic Magazine*. The writer talked about how someone asked him about his religion. He was about to respond and say that he was an atheist, but he stopped himself. He said, "I used to call myself an atheist. And I still don't believe in God, but the larger truth is that it's been years since I really cared one way or the other." In that moment, something struck him, "I was an apatheist. Meaning, I was apathetic toward the question. I don't really care about the question of God."

See, for the first time in history, our culture has the ability to not care about this question and get away with it. You can sit at Starbucks, drink your latte as an educated person, and just philosophize about ideas. You don't have to deal with questions about things like God, meaning, origins, morality, and destiny. Here's the point.

**As church leaders, we have to think like missionaries into a different world.**

What if you were the leader of a Muslim mosque? Would you say, "Well, if we paint the sign and change the name of our church to some nondescript, nondenominational name, we'll be fine. If we cut the grass and make sure the place looks nice, people will show up." Would you show up to a Muslim mosque like that? "Well, honey, they cut the grass. Let's start going to the Muslim mosque." No, of course not! You'd go with somebody who invited you because you wouldn't know what to wear or what to do.

**We are literally dealing with cross-cultural missionary thinking.**

That's what we have to do. The culture is so different than what Christians value. We have to be able to figure those things out.

Another thing about our culture is that our private worlds are in crisis. Things like anxiety, loneliness, bullying, addictions, and obesity are on the rise. Life expectancy is declining. What does the Church do about this state of the soul in the western world?

**We have to really believe, and then properly communicate, that the answer is Jesus.**

The answer is life in the Spirit. The answer is the gospel.

I was working in my office one day when one of the pastors stopped by and encouraged me to make a visit to a lady who was going through a rough time. He said, "I was praying, and it dawned on me that you should go visit her." I had never visited her before, but I agreed to go. I knocked on her door. No answer. I knocked again and again for about 15 minutes. Finally, she opened the door and let me in. It was mid-afternoon. She was in big pajamas, and she looked at me and asked, "What do you want?" I said, "Well, I guess I'm just here to encourage you. I thought I'd come by for a visit."

So we sat down, she made some tea, and we hung out for a couple of hours. As I went to leave, she asked, "Do you know why I'm still in my pajamas in the afternoon?" I said, "No."

She said, “Well, something drastic happened to me two or three weeks ago. I’ve been so depressed and lonely that today I came downstairs, went into my kitchen, and told the Lord that I was going to take my life today. I sat down on a chair and fell asleep, and I woke up to you knocking on my door.”

**See, this is the posture the Church needs to take: a Spirit-led mission that’s not just trying to save people from bad doctrine, but also trying to save them from the problem of their souls.**

We’re trying to help people with the things that make them not want to wake up in the morning. People have no steel in their spines. They have no idea how to face the day. This is what the gospel actually answers, and the Church has to be able to live it out so the world can see it.

Years ago, Jonathan Sacks, who’s a thinker, said that when it comes to the shifts that have taken place in our culture, the results lie all around us...

- The collapse of marriage
- Fracturing of the family
- Fraying of social bonds
- Partisanship in politics
- Loss of public trust in institutions
- Debt
- Consumerism
- No shared morality
- Relativism
- Hedonism

He said that we know about these things, but we’re powerless to move beyond them—we don’t know what the solution is.

**And then here’s the Church, able to offer the ultimate solution to not only societal issues, but individual issues as well.**

Looking at these five shifts may feel overwhelming. But we bring them to you because we want you to know that they represent an opportunity. We are the ones who can offer hope! We are the ones who can provide answers to the crisis of individual identity.

Recently, Carey interviewed Tim Keller, who planted a church in Manhattan, New York in 1989. It was a very secular culture. And in the context of their interview, Keller pointed out that if he were starting his church over, the thing he would focus on most is identity. Because that's what every single person is constantly thinking about in their lives.

I watched a movie where a husband and wife had a massive fight. She was upset because he worked all the time and was never home. She asked him why. He said the reason why he was a workaholic is because he thought that's what men were supposed to do. A man's supposed to provide for his family.

Then he stopped and said, "Actually, you know what? That's not why. It's because at work, I feel like somebody. I feel important." Some of you know exactly what this feels like. I know I do. It's funny—at church, I'm the boss. I can come up with a crazy idea and people will do it. It's nuts! I'm the man.

Then I go home.

I walk through the door, and there are my three daughters and my wife. And it quickly becomes obvious that I'm not the man. I'm the guy who forgot to take out the garbage. I'm the loser wearing a stupid outfit. Immediately, my ego gets squashed. It's very humbling.

I can't tell you how many times my wife has looked at me and said, "You know that I don't work for you, right? Because you're talking to me like I do." I'm like, "To be honest, it would be easier if you did!" I have an ego and identity problem.

**The challenge of Christianity is to give us an identity that transcends every circumstance that we face in life. That's the beautiful thing about Jesus—if the things that you trust in get taken away or destroyed, you can still wake up in the morning.**

This is what we have to offer.

Apatheism is a cop-out.



**Whether you're a Christian or not, the most fundamental question of your life is your existence.**

You have to pick a side. This is what I tell people who show up at a Christmas Eve or Easter service at my church. I look at people and say, "You have to pick a side. Don't be a person who's afraid to make a decision about Jesus. Some of you aren't going to follow Him today, not because you're smarter than everybody else in this room, but because you have cowardice in you. You're afraid of what your girlfriend or co-worker is going to say if you give your life to Jesus today."

We've been afraid to pick a side. We've sat around the Thanksgiving table and decided not to challenge our uncle and his ideas about the earth being flat or that we've never been to the moon. Why? Because we wanted to get through dinner. And that's a bad trade.

**We've traded seeking truth for getting along, and our challenge is to show the world that a better decision is picking a side.**

In light of these five shifts, the Church shows up in both word and deed and offers something important. You know what the prophets did in the Old Testament? They offered two things: prophetic critique and prophetic hope. See, sometimes we only do one of the two, but not both.

Andy Stanley talks about the idea that people don't simply want to know what Christianity believes or thinks. They want to know if it works. That's evangelism in the new world.

Think of the guy in the New Testament who came through the roof. As Jesus was teaching, the paralyzed man's friends put him on a mat and lowered him down to the floor. The first thing Jesus says to him is, "Your sins are forgiven." But the guy wasn't there to get his sins forgiven. He wanted to walk. He thought that was his deepest need.

Our message to the world at large is, "Listen, your deepest need isn't what you think it is. Your deepest need isn't to walk. Your deepest need is actually the forgiveness of your sins." We need to posture ourselves to model that. That's when the post-Christian West will begin to wake up to the reality of the gospel.

C. S. Lewis gave the analogy of marriage. He said that if you were to talk to a person who was a virgin and had never been married, they would respond to a conversation about marriage one particular way. They'd be excited and full of longing. On the other hand, if

you had that same conversation with a person who's divorced because they left a difficult, abusive marriage, they would respond to that conversation in a completely different way.

We are bringing Jesus to the western world. But we have to recognize that it's not a virgin culture, it's a divorced one. Culture has been through Christianity and came out on the other side. It has seen the bad parts of it. And now our job is not to just evangelize, but to re-evangelize. In a sense, that's what *The Art of Reaching* is all about.

I want you to remember this mantra...

### **Don't think church. Think mission.**

I planted a church in Vancouver in 2010. It was a very post-Christian culture. When I speak to American audiences, I usually point out the fact that Canada is probably a generation ahead of them in regard to secularization. I like to say, "I come to you from the future. And here's the reality—be hopeful."

In the last 11 years, we've baptized 1,600 people. See, here's the thing that you and I have to believe: people are still hungry. We look at the shifts in culture and get overwhelmed. We begin to wonder if there's any point to all of this. With that in mind, I'll leave you with this story.

Every year, we do an outside service in the park. We call it "church in the park" because we're so creative! This past year, a guy showed up with a fishing rod in his hand and dropped his line in a nearby pond. One of our staff members approached him and struck up a conversation.

About a half an hour into the conversation, after things got a little more vulnerable and authentic, the man said, "To be honest, I'm not fishing. There's no fish in this pond. I grabbed a fishing rod because I wanted to look like I didn't care what the speaker had to say. But I'm vastly interested to know what Jesus is all about."

The guy pretended to fish! Don't tell me that people aren't hungry!

In reality, people are desperately hungry for what's meaningful, and our job is to think like missionaries to connect with them.

That's where better reaching begins.

# Session 1: Notes

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



# Session 2

Like we've already discussed, the western world has moved into a post-Christian culture. It has already happened in Europe, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. In America, it's been accelerated dramatically over the last few years. For a lot of churches, that shows up as a decline in attendance. Over the last 20 years, since the beginning of the 21st century, church attendance has declined in every demographic. Each generation is attending less.

Growing churches are dealing with irregular attendance. Even committed Christians are showing up less often. Here's how it plays out. Let's say that you have a church of 100 attenders on a Sunday morning. If you go back three or four decades, that meant that you probably had a church that 150 people called 'home'. These days, in order to generate 100 attenders on a Sunday morning, whether that's digital or physical, you probably need 300 or 400 people who call your church home—all because people who attend, attend less often.

This trend is true of mega-churches, too. Let's say that your church reaches 5,000 people on the weekend, either in person or digital. You may have 10,000 people, or more, who call your church home. People just aren't showing up as often as they used to.

So what's behind this? There are at least five factors that are causing the shift in attendance patterns. I'll also outline how we can respond as leaders. But first, let me address the elephant in the room.

Some of you may be pushing back and asking, "Carey, why does attendance even matter? Why are we so obsessed with it?" And to be fair, some of our reasoning isn't good. I mean, those of us who are preachers like full rooms... a little too much. We love to see everybody there. There's a prideful part of it, and each of us needs to keep that in check. True confession: there have certainly been times when I've obsessed over attendance in an unhealthy way.

But here's what I really believe. **The gathered church is here to stay.** I don't think that church and the Christian faith should be individual pursuits. There are things that we need to do together as a community. If you think about how it all started, Jesus formed a community of 12 close followers, and then a wider community of 70. The early church in the first century consisted of people gathering in homes. Church wasn't about people 'consuming' God on their own.

Whether it's through micro-gatherings, attendance in a building, or online engagement,

I am confident that the gathered church is here to stay. I also believe that rarely does decreased church attendance produce increased devotion. I imagine that if I stopped going to church, I would get to a place very quickly where I'm not as close to God. I don't believe that I was created to only individually pursue my faith. I was created to be in community. So to that extent—for legitimate theological reasons—attending church and gathering as God's people matters.

Remember as we talk about the reasons for infrequent church attendance, this also includes committed Christians. Attendance isn't a litmus test of someone's faith. People simply aren't showing up as much. This is true of some of your best givers, volunteers, and inviters. Why is it happening? It's a cultural shift. And I wanted to explain it before I talk about how to respond. So let's jump in...

## **ONE: Self-Directed Spirituality.**

Let's go back 50 years. Go back to the 1970's for a moment. If people had a spiritual question, who did they turn to? Usually, they turned to the Church. If they had a question about whether or not there's a God or what happens after people die, they'd look to the Christian Church. Why? Because America, and some of the West, at that time was still a Christian culture. That's no longer the reality. Several factors have combined to make self-directed spirituality the new normal.

First, there has been a migration of authority away from institutions and organizations. These days, people will say, "I don't need to go to college to learn business. I don't need to go to seminary. I can study on my own. I have my own library—I have Google."

Second, there's a rising distrust of any institution, government, or established authority. Think about how suspicious people are of churches, denominations, colleges, and the government. It seems to be on the increase. So people are basically saying, "Not only do I not need you. I'm not sure that I trust you."

Third, the dawn of the internet and access to instant information has changed everything. You used to have to go to an institution to get educated, and now you don't. The internet gives you the ability to research just about anything.

Fourth, the rise of self as the ultimate expression. It used to be that family, community, or the Church was the bedrock. Now it's the individual. People think, "I'm in this for me,

so therefore I don't necessarily need you. I don't need community or the Church. I'm responsible to myself."

Fifth, the understanding of truth has moved from objective to subjective in our culture. Truth used to be objective. People would ask, "Is there a God? Yes or no?" And they would argue about it with other people and try to figure it out together. In the post-Christian West, truth has become relative and personal. People say things like, "Well, that may be true for you, but it's not true for me." And that's problematic because as you're trying to explain truth, people may be concluding that it's not true universally.

All of these factors play into why people are not attending church on a regular basis anymore. There are so many spiritual options for them, many of which are self-directed. So church attendance is no longer the only choice for someone who's spiritually curious. In fact, it's probably not even the starting point. It's become increasingly unlikely that if someone has a spiritual question, they'll show up at a local church.

## **TWO: A Collapse Of Guilt, Habit, And Duty.**

Some of this collapse is healthy, and some of it isn't. In the past, some church attendance was driven not just by cultural Christianity, but also by guilt, habit, and a sense of duty. Going to church was simply what you did with your Sunday mornings. People felt like the Church needed them to be there, and showing up seemed like something that they needed to do.

What's interesting, particularly in our self-directed culture, is that people always make time for the things they value most. If they don't make time for church, that should tell you something. Even among the people who say that they love your church, if declining attendance is an issue, chances are it's because they don't see a direct benefit. They've made the decision that it's better for them to stay in bed, go to the beach, or have a family day than it is to spend time with you.

I realize that's hard medicine. As someone who led a church for 20 years, I don't like thinking about that, either. But it's actually true. That's just the way people operate. They don't see value in being there week after week.

Here's another hard pill to swallow: what if there actually isn't enough value? Or what if you're simply leading out of guilt, habit, or duty? That's a bit of a gut check, right? Let me take it one step further. Here's a perplexing question to ask yourself...

Would you go to your church if you weren't on staff?

If you find yourself thinking, "Uh oh, I'm not sure that I would" well, that tells you something.

Maybe there's value in gathering that your people simply don't see. It's your job as a leader to help them see it. Failure to recognize a direct benefit to showing up always results in declining attendance. So what are you doing (or not doing) that leads people to feel like there's not enough value?

### **THREE: Greater Mobility Options And Freedom.**

People travel a lot more these days. The annual vacation has become the quarterly trip, the monthly break, or the weekend getaway. Also, think about the rise of travel sports for families. Sunday used to be a common pause day, but it's not anymore. Kinds now have cheer, football, hockey, and all kinds of other sports on Sunday.

Stores have a lot more open hours these days. When I was a kid, stores were closed on Sundays. That's no longer the case (if you want Chick-fil-A, you're still out of luck on that one!) We're a 24/7 society, and a lot of people have Sunday morning work shifts.

Sometimes, there are custody issues at play. Other times, people are just exhausted. They think, "This is the one day I get to take off, so I'm taking it off!"

### **FOUR: Digital Options.**

Live streaming and on demand are shifting the way we gather, even on Sundays. This was accelerated by the pandemic.

We'll talk a lot more about digital later in this course, but we're learning that people aren't always going to gather in the room when they have the option to gather on their phone or computer. Even if they're participating in micro-gatherings at a restaurant or someone's home, they're still accessing it digitally.



## **FIVE: Pastors Who Are Obsessed With Attendance.**

Attendance is an obsession for a lot of pastors. Like I said, there have been times when I've obsessed over it in an unhealthy way. I definitely understand the tension and struggle that it can bring! But for all the reasons we've discussed and more, the reality is that it's getting harder and harder to generate attendance.

With that in mind, here's an insight that I want you to remember: if you only focus on increasing attendance, you'll likely end up with decreasing attendance. Why? Because you'll resort to gimmicks. You'll say things like, "We have a new series coming up, and I want you to know that it's going to be our best one ever!" Or, "We're doing a huge giveaway this Sunday at church. Invite your neighbor!"

We realized long before the pandemic hit that attractional church, the model that kind of dominated the first two decades of the 21st century, has peaked. When it comes to the big light show, band, and haze, people today realize, "I can get that anywhere. Plus it's loud, and I don't really think that I need it." And then the sermon, which used to be scarce, is now everywhere. People don't have to be in a physical room anymore to connect with others and be impacted by a message. All of that is possible online.

When pastors obsess over attendance, they ask, "What do I need to do to get people in the room?" And sometimes, in response to that question, they do a dog and pony show—using gimmicks to try to capture people's attention. But I believe those days are over. Later in this course, we're going to look at ways to deepen engagement. Because if you want your church to grow, here's the key: stop trying to attract people, and start trying to engage people. We'll unpack that in a session of its own.

So now that we have a framework for why people are attending less often, the question becomes, "What do we do now? How do we respond?"

In many ways, this whole course is about how to respond. But I want to give you three very specific strategies. These are responses to the panic we feel when we're trying to fill up attendance and it seems like we're pouring water into a leaking bucket. These are not just paradigm shifts, they're heart shifts. And I think that if you adopt these things, along with the practical steps that we offer in this course, you'll see your people re-engage in your mission at a very deep level.

## **ONE: Embrace Your Infrequent Attenders.**

So let's start here. How do you interact with infrequent attenders who don't seem to embrace the mission of your church the way you hoped? You embrace them, that's what you do! Even if they haven't embraced you, you should embrace them anyways. I chose the word embrace on purpose, because I know that something inside of us wants to reject people when they reject us. For example, if someone's actions communicate to me, "Carey, I don't think your series is good enough for me to show up more than once a month," there's something in me that gets triggered by that. But if I feel rejected by someone, and I in turn reject them by the way I treat them, it's not an emotionally intelligent thing for me to do.

I think back to when I started ministry in the mid 1990's. If someone didn't attend for a little while, it was almost certain that they left the Church. But today, that isn't the case. I run into people in the supermarket who say things like, "Hey Carey, we love Connexus. It's a great church!" And I'll say, "Awesome! That's so great." Then they'll say something along the lines of, "We haven't been there all summer. We really need to get back because we really love it." Inside I'm thinking, "Okay, if you really love our church, how come you never attend? That doesn't make any sense."

What do you do in a moment like that? Well, I can tell you what will happen if you stand there with a scowl on your face and reprimand them for not being in church. You'll end up facing more empty seats. You have to think about approaching it from an emotionally intelligent viewpoint.

I have an on and off relationship with exercise. About a year ago, I took up winter running. I'd never really been a runner, and I can honestly say that I didn't enjoy it. I'd rather be cycling. The first few runs were really slow, painful, and exhausting. I was fortunate to run a mile and a half in slow motion. My wife ran with me. She's in much better shape—and about 100 pounds lighter—than me. She could've easily lapped me and ran circles around me. She could've mocked me and told me that walking would've been faster (which was probably true!) She could've left sarcastic comments on my social media.

You know what she did instead? She celebrated my running. As slow as it was, she said, "Carey I'm so proud of you. You're doing a great job. Thank you for running with me." And you know what? That inspired me. After my first few runs, I got a little bit faster. Within a month, I did my first 5k. And now, a year later, I can run a 5k multiple times a week with

ease. In fact, I've actually cut about four minutes a kilometer off my pace. And my wife Toni has cheered me on the entire way.

Her encouragement was a real encouragement to me. She could've judged me. She could've shamed me. She had every right to. But the fact that she supported me made a difference. And I think that's what we need to do with infrequent church attenders.

Think about how you treat your kids when they take their first step. You don't shame them and say, "Oh my goodness, I thought you were going to do this months ago." Or "You took one step. I thought you'd be running by now. What's the deal?" No, you applaud like crazy! You pick them up. You hug them. You reward them. You post the video of their first steps on Instagram. You get a thousand likes for it!

What if you just started treating infrequent attenders with the same empathetic heart? What if you said, "Oh man, I was so glad you were there in the spring. We really miss you. I hope you'll come back. What can I do to serve you or help you?" You see, instead of judging infrequent attenders, love them. Loving people is a far more effective evangelism strategy than judging them. And people tend to gravitate toward where they feel valued most. So when people don't attend as often as you want, embrace them, encourage them, and celebrate them. And my guess is that they'll probably engage a little more often.

## **TWO: Equip People To Be The Church, Not Just Go To Church.**

Think back to the Bible. Jesus never said, "Attend me." He said, "Follow me." A similar dynamic emerged in the first century church. Early Christians didn't attend church—they were the Church. Sure, they gathered in community. But when they went out, they were Jesus to the people around them. If you look back at the genesis of the Jesus movement, the idea of attendance as a hallmark was completely foreign. They only attended because they were engaged. Period.

You and I are the Church...

- We're the Church when we're at work.
- We're the Church when we're at our neighbor's house for a backyard barbecue.
- We're the Church when we're at a family gathering.
- We're the Church when we're exercising at the gym.
- We're the Church wherever we go.

We need to focus on helping people understand this.

## **THREE: Focus On Equipping People Even More Than Gathering Them.**

For too many years, pastors have focused on one thing—getting the greatest number of people in the room at the same time. Sometimes it has been about ministry, and sometimes it has been about ego. But just know that people are always going to gather in the Church. In the future, however, more people will gather outside of the room than in. There will be people who watch online individually, and people who get together in micro-gatherings and home gatherings. The paradigm shift in this new era of church is that the most engaged people may not actually be in the room.

Right now, most pastors use online church to get people into the building. But in the future, most pastors will use the building to reach people online. Just because people aren't attending the way they used to, it doesn't mean they aren't engaged or in community. People can, and will, gather outside a church building. If in-person attendance is the only way you know how to grow your church, you probably need a new model. Engaged people may not be in the room, and that's okay. They're still part of the Church. They're still doing work in the community. They're still reading their bibles. They're still serving their families. They're still growing. Your job is to connect them rather than just focus on gathering them. Because in the future, churches that equip people will eclipse churches that gather them.

# Session 2: Notes

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



# Session 3

I want to start off by giving you a bit of hope.

One of my mentors in life, Ray Johnston, runs one of the biggest churches in all of California. His daughter was doing a project for school where she needed to interview a leader. So she came to her dad because, in her words, he's "the best leader I know."

To start, she asked him one simple question: "What's one thing that you need as a leader every single day?"

He answered without hesitating: "I need encouragement. In order to get up and do what I do, I need encouragement."

So to start, I want to give you some encouragement. As much as the culture has turned, people are still hungry. As much as we think the mission that we've been talking about is hopeless, it's not. People are coming to know Jesus in this world. We've got to believe that, right? There's a model for this in the Bible. If you read the book of Judges, you'll see it happen. There's a decline, but then renewal. Because after decline, there's always renewal.

The key is having a strategy, which is what this course is about. The key is having a Spirit-led mission. The answer is in believing that there's a renewal that's possible within the Church if we actually prioritize the right things instead of thinking that the answer is to become more like the world.

**The more you become like the world, the less likely you actually are to reach the world.**

Statistics have proven this to be true. The Churches and denominations that keep their counter cultural elementals tend to grow. It's the ones that abandon those things over the last 40 years that have faced a decline.

Rodney Stark, who's a historian of religion, talks about the idea that when a culture goes secular, it doesn't tend to kill the Church. Instead, here's what it does: It stimulates innovation. As leaders, we have to be willing to recognize that the moment we're in right now in culture can actually help keep our churches alive. It can stimulate innovation so that the mission will still get accomplished. It can shape the way we do ministry in the world, and that's so important.

But what are the things that we actually need to prioritize? There's a book I read a few years ago called Essentialism. In it, Greg McKeown says that every day, we have to decide whether or not we're going to do certain things. When you look at an opportunity, you

have to decide, on a scale of 1 to 10, how much that opportunity fits into your life and mission. If your answer is anything other than a 9 or 10, his advice is simple: “Don’t do it.”

He calls this the “Hell yeah principle.” Or maybe, because we’re all good Christians, we’ll call it the “Heck yeah principle.” If your answer is a 9 or 10 on the scale, then you’re essentially saying, “Heck yeah, I have to do this!” If it’s anything less than that, try not to take it on. Why? Because when that “Heck yeah” thing comes your way, you won’t have the margin to do it. You’ve already said yes to a bunch of 5, 6, or 7 opportunities, and they’re taking up your time. So, we have to prioritize the right things.

There’s a story out of Matthew 16 that helped our church prioritize three things that still define us today: gospel, community, and culture. Those are our “Heck yeah principles.” They’re the things that we believe will help us have an effective ministry in a post-Christian world. Let’s check it out...

*“Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi” (Matthew 16:13 ESV).*

Right away, this is a fascinating point. Caesarea Philippi was not a Jewish, Christian, or religious place. Caesarea Philippi was a place where pagans lived—people who were against Jesus, against Judaism, and against the kingdom of God. But this is the place Jesus chose to go. He chose to go in to this pagan culture. This goes back to what we talked about a few sessions ago. How do we be contextual? In other words, how do we do ministry that’s shaped around the realities of the culture we’re in, whether we like it or not.

Lesslie Newbigin was a missionary in India for 30 years. He gave the example of planting a church and putting up a big billboard to advertise it. What would the billboard say? Maybe something like, “Jesus is the only way to be born again.” If you read this billboard in the western world, you understand it immediately. It’s like, “Oh hey, this is the gospel.” But in his context in India, it would be a completely different thing. There, the concept of being born again is read differently. They believe you’re always born again because of reincarnation. So that billboard wouldn’t speak to the gospel; it would speak to reincarnation. Context plays a key role.

When we go into these “pagan territories,” we have to understand how the culture there thinks. We need to understand what it means to be salt and light—how to be the part of culture that penetrates and preserves. Well, you can’t do that without first going to the places where you’re uncomfortable, like Caesarea Philippi. These are the places where your



ministry, youth ministry, women's ministry, young adult ministry, or preaching ministry might look a little different. Because, as Craig Groeschel talks about, you have to do things that are different to reach people who aren't in your church yet. You have to be innovative and think of new ideas.

But if you commit to going to those places, you have to get comfortable with the fact that you're going to be afraid. You're going to be out of your comfort zone. You're going to have to do things in a way you've never done. Is it scary? Of course! But if you're not a little afraid, you're not a leader. If you're not a little out of your comfort zone, how are you depending on the Spirit to show up and do a mighty thing?

Along with the willingness to go, you also have to be able to pitch a vision that's compelling and costly. See, when we go to places like Caesarea Philippi, we think we have to make Christianity easy for them. But wouldn't you rather have 100 people sold out to the right mission than 500 people sold out to the watered-down mission? Here's the deal...

- New people will bring new people to your church.
- Excited people will bring new people.
- People who are engaged with the mission will bring new people.
- People who are contributing rather than just consuming will bring new people.

And that's how you're going to grow.

In order to find people who are engaged and compelled by a vision, you have to share a vision that's costly. You have to find one that's big enough to say, "We're going to have to stretch in order to actually do this."

### **You have to be able to pitch a missionary vision.**

This isn't a church growth vision. Church growth is the means by which you're accomplishing the end goal—to reach people and disciple them. That's the whole point.

And finally, when you go to Caesarea Philippi, you have to make sure that your movement is dependent on the Spirit of God. We can be pragmatic and practical, but we also have to depend on the Spirit showing up. In other words, we have to make sure that it's driven by prayer. Spurgeon talks about how the prayer room in his church was the engine of his church. If you look at any great movement, renewal, or revival throughout history, they were driven by prayer. They were made up of people who were spiritually crying out to God.

I once read the biography of Billy Graham. There was a moment in his life when he was a young preacher. He went into churches to preach evangelistic messages. But at that time, no one was coming to know Jesus. He would give an invitation, but no one would take a step forward. Frustrated, Billy turned to a mentor for help. The mentor offered to spend three days with Billy where they would do one thing: pray. Each day they'd pray together, and then in the evening, Billy would preach at these churches.

On the first day, they prayed that God would give Billy an anointing. That evening, nothing different happened when he preached.

On the second day, they prayed the same thing. That evening, once again nothing happened.

On the third day, Billy felt something shift in their time of prayer. It was a palpable shift where the tangible presence of the Lord came over him. That night when he preached, everything changed. Not even halfway through his sermon, people in the Church were already repenting of their sins and giving their lives to Jesus. The difference? The presence of and reliance on the Holy Spirit.

If we think that we're going to reach the post-Christian world without the power of the Spirit, we're fooling ourselves. Most renewal movements that happen throughout history start as prayer movements. Tim Keller makes an amazing point that prayer is the main way that we experience deep change—the reordering of ourselves and our lives. Prayer is how God gives us so many of the unimaginable things that He has for us. I love the line where he says that prayer makes it safe for God to give us many of the things that we most desire. If He just gave them to us, we wouldn't know what to do with them. Prayer puts us into the character posture that can actually handle the ministry that He has set out for us.

So here's a breakdown of the three principles that define us...

## **ONE: Gospel.**

We start by focusing on the gospel. We have to get clarity on the gospel and understand that the message we actually have is about Jesus. Let's look back at this interaction in Matthew...

*“He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Simon Peter replied, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God’” (Matthew 16:15-16 ESV).*

This is really important. Your job is not to get people to believe in God in general. Vague spirituality is not the answer to the issues of the post-Christian world. It has to be exclusively and explicitly about Jesus. It matters that He came, lived a perfect life, died on a cross, took on the wrath of God, acted as an atonement for our sins, and rose again from death. Do you know that there isn't one sermon in the book of Acts that doesn't talk about the death and the resurrection of Jesus? If you haven't preached that Jesus died and rose again to forgive sins, you haven't preached the gospel. You've preached about spirituality in general, which we have a lot of in the post-Christian world. But that's not what solves the actual problem. You have to tell people that they're separated from God. They have to understand the sin that they're dealing with in their lives. And they have to get the answer to that in Jesus.

D.A. Carson pointed this out years ago. He said that if God thought our problem was a lack of entertainment, He would have sent an entertainer. If He thought our problem was political, He would have sent a politician. If He thought our problem was economic, He would have sent an economist. But He didn't. He sent a savior because our problem is sin. That's what we have to understand, and that's the gospel message that we have to be able to explain.

This is not religion. Religion and the gospel are opposites. When we read John chapter eight, a woman is caught in adultery and brought to Jesus. Jesus says, “I don't condemn you. Go and sin no more.” Order matters here. Religion says, “Go and sin no more, and then I won't condemn you.” But the gospel says, “I don't condemn you because of My work. Now go and sin no more.”

One day, I was about to take a flight to go speak in Australia. Honestly, I don't love flying. Flying from Vancouver to Australia meant 16 hours (over water the entire flight). Not my idea of a good time!

Before I left, I looked at my church and said, “Let me tell you something. I know that my temptation as a preacher is to try to attract you. I want to tell you that Jesus will solve your issues and make you healthy, wealthy, and wise. But I can't do that. Because here's the truth—today, as I fly to Australia, I might die. The gospel doesn't tell me that I'm not going to die. The gospel tells me that I'm safe dying.”

That's the thing our culture needs to understand."

Here's the other thing you have to understand. As you lead your ministry in this reality of the gospel, resist the urge to compare yourself to other churches, leaders, preachers, and pastors. You have to feel confident that you have a contribution to make that's unlike anybody else. You have to walk in that freedom or you're going to become insecure.

Picture your marriage. One of the most toxic things in a marriage is comparison. I've done so much marriage counseling with couples who struggle with it. He scrolls Instagram and thinks, "Oh, my goodness, Sarah wears these clothes and looks really nice. Look at my wife. She hasn't put herself together lately." Then she's like, "Look at Tony. He has a great job and makes a lot of money. What's with my husband over here?" That's where disrespect begins. Comparison takes root and breeds so many other toxic things in the relationship.

One of the best preachers I know is a guy named Chris Brown who preaches at a church in San Diego. The thing that he does differently than most other preachers is telling stories as first-person narratives. He's brilliant at it because he's a great actor. He'll be like, "I felt the dust on my chest, and I smelled the smoke. As I held the donkey bone in my hand and slayed the last man, I realized where my strength came from." He can do this for 30 minutes, and you're like, "Oh, my gosh, I am Samson right now. I'm in the zone. I mean, I can smell it; it's beautiful."

Now, here's the problem. I've seen other pastors try to do this, and it just doesn't work. Maybe you've been to a Christmas Eve service where your pastor walks out and is like, "I'm a shepherd. Hello. Where is Bethlehem?" And you're like, "Why is my pastor now a time traveling shepherd? I brought my buddy, what's going on right now?" They're trying to be Chris Brown, but they're doing an awful job at it. Instead of comparing, they need to simply be who they are. That's what we all need to do.

I remember the first time I preached. I got hired at a church where the preaching was based around fill-in-the-blank notes. Every time the other pastor preached, he started off with a joke and then moved to his fill-in-the-blank model. So I thought that's what I had to do. The problem? I was so bad at it. My jokes were terrible. I was trying to be someone else, and it didn't work.

**We all have to understand that God is building something unique in each of us. He's building your church and your ministry with all the skills and talents that you have, and you're supposed to lean into those things so that you're most effective in ministry.**

Think about the parable of the talents. The evaluation by the master wasn't just based on faithfulness. People say, "We're really bad at doing stuff as a church, but at least we're being faithful." Jesus is like, "No, I'm evaluating you, and my definition of faithful is actually fruitfulness. You turned five into ten, so I'm going to give you a reward." It's not just that you buried five and that's it. It's not just being faithful in it. Jesus wants you to use what you're effective at. He wants you to be fruitful.

As a guy who planted a church with 16 people in a post-Christian city that didn't have a chance in the world, I'm here to tell you that you have to trust the gospel! What Paul says in Romans is true: it's the power of God unto salvation.

When I was a little kid, I developed Tourette Syndrome, and I would randomly swear at people. When you randomly throw around the F-bomb, the one job in life that you're never going to get is a preacher! Nothing about my life should've worked the way it has. But because I trust in the gospel, it has power. In the Greek, it means to actually save people. Don't think that you have to have something other than the gospel, because the power isn't anywhere else. It still works!

**And here's the beautiful part of the gospel. It's the most liberating, beautiful message of all, because it's about the works of Jesus on our behalf. It's not about our works for Him.**

I was once a 24-year-old intern at a church. I was working on my computer while all the pastors were out. The Church secretary walked in and said, "There's a woman here. She needs to talk to a pastor." I said, "Well, let's go find one." But she replied, "You're it. You're the only one here." So I guess I was up to bat! The woman came in and told me that she was sleeping with her best friend's husband. Of course, she felt terrible. She didn't know what to do. What did I offer her in that moment? The gospel. Because there's no good news like the good news of the gospel.

Imagine if I would've offered her karma. I would've said, "Don't worry, if you do a lot of good things, you'll get good things. But you've done bad things. So now the universe is out to get you." She would've left completely depressed and destroyed inside. Even offering her religion wouldn't have been helpful. Religion would've said, "You should be stoned for this." But the gospel says, "Jesus took this punishment for you, and I want you to trust in Him. You can leave here understanding that there's now no condemnation for you. You can go and sin no more."

**See, the beautiful thing about the cross is that it has every aspect of hope. It has every angle.**

It has the victory over Satan, sin, and death that people are looking for. It has the old concept of expiation. I know we don't preach this very often, but expiation is this beautiful concept about the cross where Jesus Christ not only died for the sins you do, but also for the sins that have been done to you. Think about the people in our culture who are suicidal, who've been abused sexually, or who are isolated. Think about the people who feel like victims. Now you're able to give them a message that says, "Jesus can literally wash clean not only the things that you've done, but also the things that have been done to you."

I preach this old, Jesus-focused gospel every week. And you know what? People come to know Jesus. Sometimes we grow by 100-200 people in a week. My fear for some of you is that you think you're preaching the gospel, but you're not all the way there. You speak about Jesus, but you haven't gotten to the part where He actually took our place and saved us from our sins. You're dancing close to what's true without getting there.

I'll give you an example. My family and I were vacationing in Palm Springs. I love to sit on the beach. I love the sand. On this particular day, I was at the pool, and I realized that there was an area filled with sand. It was like they created a beach right by the pool! So I took all my stuff and camped out in that area. Every single day while my family was out doing other things, I was right there in the same spot. It was great.

Finally, after several days, my family joined me. They immediately said, "What are you doing here? This isn't a space for you!" I looked around and saw a sign that indicated that this was an area just for kids. So for three days, there I was...

- An adult.
- By myself.
- Camped out in the kiddie pool area.

I looked like a total weirdo, right? See, I didn't get it. I thought I was in the right place, but I wasn't. I needed someone to explain it to me explicitly, so that I'd understand why mothers were pulling their kids closer when they walked by me each day!

Your job as a leader is not to be vague. It's to be clear. It's to share the message of Christ. It's to present the whole gospel.

## TWO: Community.

Community needs to be a priority. Why? **Because people belong before they believe.** This is so important. We sometimes don't recognize this, but it's true.

I had our staff read a book on Disney, because they strive to be one of the most hospitable organizations in the world. I think the Church should be the same! In this book, one of the writers said, "It's not just the product that makes for satisfied customers; it's the way they are treated."

**We have to understand that the effectiveness of the Church often comes from the strong ties we have relationally and communally—to one another, and to the culture we're trying to reach.**

Let me just say that again, because I'm not sure we think like this: **The effectiveness is often driven by the strong ties that we have communally.** Malcolm Gladwell gives a great example of this in his book, *The Tipping Point*, which is all about social epidemics. In my opinion, it's actually one of the most helpful books you can read as an evangelist. In one particular part, he talks about the moment in history when Paul Revere rode through towns shouting, "The Redcoats are coming, the Redcoats are coming!" People listened to Paul Revere, right? Well, there was another guy who rode through towns saying the same thing, but nobody listened to him. Gladwell says that the reason people listened to Paul Revere is because he already had social ties. Everybody knew who he was.

So, the question is: Are you leaning into anyone? Are you being communal with them? Are you building any kind of relational ties? Because that's the only way they're going to listen.

My wife had a bunch of surgeries a couple years ago. For a week, I didn't have to make a meal because the Church showed up. It was the Church being the Church to me. And it was an amazing communal thing. And that's what we can offer the world. **Some of the biggest issues in the world are isolation and loneliness. The Church has something to offer those things that no one else does. We have real, authentic community.**

At our church, we do a lot of video. Let's say that 7,000 people come to our church in person every weekend. That's great, right? Well, the reality is that we post those services online every Monday morning. So here's my question every weekend: what are these people doing here? Why do they show up? Why do they get out of bed, shower, fight parking, and show up to drink bad coffee? Why would they come here to get something

human beings need connection. There's something about us that needs that high five in a time of difficulty. We need that hug or greeting. We need the offer to pray for us during hardship. What's driving people is relationship.

**One key principle is that people in your church will show up for an opportunity, but they'll stay for a relationship.** Whether it's a parking team, tech team, or worship team, they'll show up for the opportunity, but the ones who are still around a year or two later are the people who get connected. The same is true when it comes to your staff members. You can take them to dinner, get to know them, and take part in their lives. In doing so, you're creating what has been called the "experience economy." The idea is that as a culture, we've moved from people who just consume products to people who need things that are communal.

That's why in verse 18, this priority of community is so huge...

*"I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my church" (Matthew 16:18 ESV).*

It's the people. That's the foundation. There's a shift in regard to church growth—people want to actually experience God. This is where we see the power of community. The Church is set free to actually be the Church when it actually experiences God. That's why Jesus looked at these guys and said, "I give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 16:19 ESV).

What I love about this is that Jesus is giving us the keys. Oftentimes we're like, "Jesus, you take the keys and do some great stuff." But Jesus is like, "No, you take them." It's our job as the Church. Imagine if at our churches, it wasn't just one evangelist on stage at 9:00 and 11:00 leading people to Jesus. What if it was thousands of people leading people to Jesus on a Tuesday morning in their living room? That's when the Church starts to have impact that reaches wider.

Think about Matthew 18, where Jesus talks about church discipline. He explains how if someone sins over and over again, he has to talk about it with the Church. Do you know what's fascinating that Jesus doesn't say in that passage? He doesn't say, "When you find your buddy sinning, go tell the elders." Do you know why He doesn't say that? Because it's the Church's job. I tell my church, "You're emailing me about your problems. Don't bring me that stuff. I have three daughters; I'm busy! Here are the keys; be the Church. It's your job, not mine."



In a world that can be isolated and fragmented, this makes the Church a breath of fresh air. Because it says, “I want you to use your spiritual gifts—your wiring, money, time, talent, treasure, and personality—to actually do the mission of Jesus.”

But of course, the community has to be healthy. **You know why I think a lot of Christians fight about little things? Because we’re not on mission.** Here’s what I mean. In marriage counseling, when a couple fights in front of me, I typically stop and point out one thing: they don’t have a mission as a marriage. Like so many of us, they’re just trying to survive. But that’s not a mission. And without a mission, they won’t win the war.

Remember the scene in *Saving Private Ryan* where they turned on each other? Why? Because they were sitting stagnant. They had no one to kill. So they went after each other. The Church can work the same way. If we don’t understand what the enemy is, and that it’s our mission to save people from that, we’ll fight with each other over every little thing. We’ll turn on each other and become useless as a community.

I remember when I first came to church as a 19-year-old chain smoking kid wearing baggy pants. What drove me crazy was the stuff that Christians fought about. I was like, “Why do they care about any of that?” I couldn’t understand it. It seemed like the Church was lost in stuff that didn’t matter. And I think we’re at risk of the same thing happening now.

Right now, there’s a movement of the Holy Spirit, and it seems to be happening faster than almost any movement in history. Do you know where it’s happening? In China, where it’s illegal to be a Christian.

60 years ago, China put up what was called the Bamboo Curtain. They kicked out all of the missionaries, nationalized all of the buildings, and killed or imprisoned all of the leaders. The government said, “Christianity is not allowed here.” Everyone thought, “Oh my goodness, Christianity is going to be dead in China.” Well, 50 years later, the Bamboo Curtain comes down and Christian missionaries go back in. What did they find? More than 65 million believers in China. **Why? Because the people had to rally together in new ways to come alive in Christ.**

## **THREE: Culture.**

Most churches have become havens of refuge versus dynamic centers of culture transformation. Jesus says,

*“I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18 ESV).* You know what the job of the Church is? It’s not to change the laws of your country—it’s to reach the judges, lawyers, and students who will change the laws. It’s to reach parents of kids and teachers of students. **You change a nation by reaching your community.**

Our job is to engage people mentally—engage the life of the mind. Culture is filled with evidential thinkers who are logical and educated. I’m an evidential thinker myself. And I wasn’t reached by pithy sayings from the Church. No, I needed to be engaged from a philosophical, historical, and scientific perspective. I needed to understand that Christianity isn’t just a nice idea, it’s the best and truest idea in the marketplace of ideas.

My daughter recently wanted to go on a walk with her friend. I didn’t feel like she was old enough to go by herself. So I got in my car and actually followed behind them. I parked at the pizza joint, and I watched my 12-year-old daughter walk all around town. Why? Because I’m an evidential thinker. I need to see, watch, and know what’s happening. That’s the kind of people that our culture is filled with.

Here’s why I’m making this point. **Sometimes the Church settles for sentimental, and they abandon the life of the mind.** Years ago, Charles Malik gave an address about evangelism. He said that at the heart of all the problems facing western civilization—the manifold perversions of personal character, problems of the family, problems of economics and politics, problems of the media, problems affecting the school and church itself—at the heart of all of that lies the state of the mind. He went on to say that the true task of the evangelical world is not only to win souls, for if you win the whole world and lose the mind of the world, you will soon discover you have not won the world at all. Indeed, it may turn out that you’ve actually lost the world.

The other thing you have to engage is the life of the heart. **Christianity isn’t about God wanting to change what you do; it’s about God wanting to change what you want to do.** That’s how you actually live the Christian life—God changes your affections. What you do with your money, your sex life, and your family, God wants to shape that. So we show the world that with Jesus, your passions shift and change. It’s not going to be behavior modification; that’s not actually the way to live. It’s about letting God transcend your own moral choices in order to lead you. Why? Because He knows better. On His worst day, He knows better than you do.

One of the things I've stopped doing as a pastor is weddings. Why? Because I get frustrated at the wedding vows. As a culture, we have this weird thing where we want to write our own vows. But those vows only reflect the way the couple feels right now. What I want to do is fast forward 10 years. I want to see what it's like as the groom walks through the grocery store three kids later. He hasn't had sex in a month, and his wife doesn't greet him at the door the way she used to. He walks through aisle four and sees a beautiful woman. She's actually dressed up. She flashes her eyelashes at him, and he starts to feel something. What's he going to do then? What vow is going to help him in that moment?

See, our culture runs by how it feels. And we have to be very careful not to make decisions based on how we feel, because it can derail our lives. **The gospel comes in and says, "Jesus can literally change not just what you do, but also how you feel. He can shape what you see as the good life." Jesus does these things because He knows what's better. He changes our hearts to want what He wants for us.**

When I was 17 years old, people would describe the sexual ethic of Christianity to me and I'd think, "Wait, wait, hold on. Marriage means just one girl forever?" But once I came to know Jesus, He changed the way I saw that ideal. He helped me see that it's the way we flourish. It's the best thing for me. And I think that's the way we have to talk about things like this in church. Listen, culture is already talking about it. It's the stuff that people actually wonder about.

One way to solve that is to understand Thomas Chalmers, who's a thinker. He wrote a sermon back in the day called the "Expulsive Power of a New Affection." He talked about how the only way to ever dispossess someone of an idol is to actually replace it with something they love more. For example, if a young person is obsessed with money, the way you get them to stop being obsessed with money is to get them obsessed with politics. You can't just tell someone to stop doing something; you have to give them something they love to replace it with. The gospel comes in and says, "The only way you're going to defeat that sin is by loving Jesus more than you love the sin." It's a heart thing, but often, we just come at it as a behavior thing. We start telling people, "You have to behave a certain way." The gospel says that you have to take Jesus as your Lord and Savior. Yes, that's true, but you also can take Him as your treasure.

I was at an apologetics conference in California, and I had 5,000 people in front of me. They wanted me to do a one-hour discussion about the resurrection. So I did it. I talked about the Swoon Theory, and why the history of the Roman Empire couldn't have done this. I deconstructed all types of antithetical explanations of the resurrection. And then I asked a simple question: "Do you believe in it?" Of course, everyone was like, "Yes!" Then I said, "But here's the problem. Satan believed it, too, and it didn't save him. Why not? Because he didn't treasure it. He didn't trust it as the greatest reality in the universe."

I heard one person put it this way: sometimes we pitch Christianity as having faith in Jesus. Having faith in Jesus means that you sit on the stool of Jesus. You trust what He's done for you, you sit down, and you believe. But Christianity is more than that. It's not that you just sit on the stool; it's that you actually love the stool, embrace it, and hold it as the greatest treasure in the universe. It actually starts to change you on a deeper level. That's what I want for you, and that's how I want you to engage the gospel with your culture.

# Session 3: Notes

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



# Session 4

A few years ago, I was lucky enough to go to Hawaii. While I was there, I found myself sitting in a hot tub chatting with seven or eight strangers. All of a sudden, a guy came out of nowhere. He ran across the pool area, straight to the patio, and jumped into the hot tub. He bombarded us by jumping in and completely splashing us. Then he went under the water for several seconds, and the rest of us were like, “What’s this guy’s deal?” But when he came back to the surface, we were stunned to see what happened.

He was holding a child.

His son had been under the water the entire time, and none of us had realized it. It was this man’s son, and now he’s hitting him on the back trying to help him to cough. He had been there the entire time, and all seven of us in the hot tub didn’t notice.

We didn’t see it.

We didn’t hear it.

We were so distracted by what we were talking about that we missed the fact that someone was literally dying under the water next to us.

It was a scary moment that thankfully turned out okay. But if we’re honest, I’d think we’d all say that we can relate to moments like this in the Church. **We get so distracted by all the things that we’re worried about in ministry that we sometimes stop noticing the people around us who need help.** We don’t see the people who need saving. We’re not actually reaching anybody, because we’re too busy talking about the wrong stuff.

That’s really the heart behind this whole course. We’re trying to say, “As church leaders, are we making sure that we’re being effective at the right things?” Because it’s one thing to be effective. But effective at what? What exactly is the job of the Church?

In Matthew 28, we get to what is called The Great Commission, where Jesus says, “Go and make disciples of all nations... teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19-20 NIV).

Now, here’s the thing about this. You could have a church that has a ton of influence. You could be doing things online. You could be doing a lot of great outreach with a ton of impact. But if you’re not actually making disciples, you’re not doing what the Church is called to do. You’re still not actually effective at the right kinds of things.

Think about that Great Commission. Jesus doesn't say, "Here's the Great Commission. I want you to teach the world all that I commanded you." No, Jesus says, "I want you to teach them to observe all that I commanded." Now that's a whole other thing. Because you can teach a parrot all that Jesus commanded. A parrot can say, "Love your neighbor." But to teach them how to observe it? To teach them to actually do it? That's something else. See, your job is not just to help people know what Jesus commands; it's to teach them how to observe what Jesus is actually calling them to do. We have to understand our job before we can do it.

Now, how do we do that job? There was a movie years ago called *Gone Baby Gone*. It's about a cop in a rough part of Boston who searched for a missing kid. At the beginning, the cop walked down the street and the voiceover said, "*The world's pretty rough. How do I get to heaven and not get ruined by all the evil in the world?*" And then he says, "*The answer is what God has said to his children, 'Be wise as serpents, and innocent as doves.'*" That balance—striking those two things at the same time—is what we need to do in order to reach the culture that we find ourselves in. We can't be naive, silly, or dumb. We have to be smart. We have to be shrewd as serpents.

Snakes are shrewd and tricky. Sometimes, the Church just doesn't do that well. We don't think smart. We don't think strategic. We don't think tricky. We don't think shrewd. But we have to. Think about Richard Dawkins. He's an evolutionary psychologist and Darwinian thinker with a PhD from Oxford. He represents atheism and naturalism, among other things. And then, representing Christianity, we have some guy with two teeth who lives in a swamp. Sometimes, this is the conversation that the western culture thinks is happening between reason and faith. That's why our job is to go, "No, that's not the way the conversation is going." **We run the ramp of reason before taking the leap of faith.** This is part of what Christianity offers the world, and it's our job to make sure that culture understands that.

So, how are we going to do that? How are we going to be wise as serpents and innocent as doves? Organizationally, how will we posture ourselves this way?

**Here's what it's going to take: Vision and leadership.**

As we talked about before, in Disney culture, hospitality is huge. The guy writing about that said, "The quality of service that people receive is what defines whether they



actually buy-in to what your organization is. It's not just the product that makes for satisfied customers, it's the way they're treated." The key to that at church is that your staff has to be on point. Your leaders have to be on point. Your volunteers have to be on point. Effective leadership trickles down to all of those people. So the writer continues, "In other words, the customer doesn't come first. Leadership comes first." That's where it all begins. It moves from leadership, then it moves to staff, then it moves to volunteers, and then it moves to your people. **You have to model excellence from the top if you want it to trickle down.** Excellence has to be a core part of everything you're doing.

I remember when we started Village Church. There were 16 of us in my house, and then we moved into this little elementary school gym. Then, we had about 50 people in the room. I was 29 years old, which is young! But even then, I was preaching and striving toward excellence because I wanted people in the town to see that. We were trying to reach professionals in the business world who were dealing with professional representation every single day. So if the lady at the front desk at our church put together some pamphlet with nineties clip art, they weren't buying in.

To reach these people, I took on the mentality that every detail was important. Every tablecloth in this little elementary school gym had to reach the floor because I didn't want the metal legs to show. The lighting had to be perfect. The black drapes needed to be placed correctly. All of that stuff mattered to me because I wanted the professionals who walked in that gym to say, "I wasn't sure about a church that met in an elementary school gym, but when I showed up here, I was impressed with your excellence." To pull that off, I needed my whole leadership to have that vision.

And so do you! You have to have that vision—that heart. And then, you have to make sure your leaders do, too. Because then it's going to filter down to your staff and volunteers, who are going to start serving with the same excellence. I used to show up early and set all that stuff up. And eventually, my volunteers started doing the same. They put their whole hearts into it. And it made my job easier and our church better.

This kind of vision creates value. It tells people what you prioritize. And then, it moves to guest satisfaction. Look at a Ray Kroc, the founder of McDonald's. Two brothers started making burgers, and Ray Kroc came in and bought it. But what he bought wasn't a burger joint; he bought a system. He bought the system that makes French fries for six minutes, not seven. The system that puts three pickles on a burger. The system that

creates satisfaction. Then, he multiplied that system, and that's ultimately what created the results. As leaders, we have to be able to lead that process. We have to know our systems and execute them with excellence.

Now, here's another thing you have to do as a visionary and a leader. You have to constantly come back to the question of why. There's this great book called *Start with Why*. It's our job as leaders to keep the why in front of our church. Every 30 days, you have to get in front of your people and remind them of your why. *Why do we exist? What are we actually doing here? Why does this matter?* It's your job as a leader to cast that vision for your congregation consistently.

There's a video I watched recently about Buster Douglas fighting Mike Tyson. At this point in his career, Mike Tyson had never been knocked out. And then Buster Douglas, of course, knocked him out. The video I saw was all about why Buster Douglas could actually punch out Mike Tyson. The answer? Because his mother told everybody, "My son's going to knock out Mike Tyson. My son's going to beat my Tyson." A few days before the fight, his mother died. So then, Buster Douglas had a choice. He could let that vision die with his mom, or he could carry it out for her. The narrator in the video said, "Even though Mike Tyson's pummeling him with punches, why can Buster Douglas get back up and actually knock out Mike Tyson? Because his why was greater than that punch."

Imagine if your why was that great. **That why can make you do a lot of things—supernatural things that you never could've never dreamed of for your life!** If your church doesn't understand what your why is, then the money won't follow. The people won't follow. Their time won't follow. There has to be a vision. There has to be action.

A guy named J. Oswald Sanders said this: "If you want to build a ship, don't summon people to buy wood, prepare tools, distribute jobs, and organize the work. Rather, teach people the yearning for the wide, boundless ocean, and then they're going to be motivated." This is your job as a leader. Sometimes we get so micro that we forget the macro. **We get in the weeds, and we forget to bring the people up to the big picture with us.** That's what people are looking for in their lives and in the Church. It's what we need to remember as we lead the mission that God has for us in the present world. What's the big picture?

Right now, I'm trying to raise \$30 million as a church. I have to build a \$50 million building. We're hoping to borrow \$20 million and raise the additional \$30 million. This is

a huge project, right? How could it even be possible in post-Christian Canada? You have a kid up there in his hoodie and running shoes, teaching the Bible, trying to raise millions of dollars. It's insane, right? To be honest, we've lost people from our church over it. They don't really want to give money or buy into it. But the people who do give—the people who get behind it—are with us. They're there because they know the mission.

We homeschool our kids, and there's all kinds of priorities that get thrown at you when you're homeschooling. Of course, we have to prioritize things in our lives to stay organized. But my wife has this little phrase where she says, "The vision makes the decision." In other words, the vision for our family is the thing that actually helps us decide what to do and not do.

So, when you're trying to reach people, you have to maintain the vision. You have to ask yourself if you're trying to just maintain the Church? Or are you trying to maintain the vision?

**You're never going to be able to accomplish great things in your community if the goal of your church is just to hang out and have fellowship. It has to be bigger than that.** Because people engage with a vision. People serve in alignment with a vision. People give to support a vision. Martin Luther King Jr. once said, "Stop boring people with your plans and inspire them with your vision." And he's right! We have to come at this with confidence. We have to be confident that we know what we're doing here.

**And as a leader, you have to have absolute identity with your cause.** When we were starting our church, people could tell this was my life. I would take a bullet for this vision, literally. There were times when I was preaching and would get a phone call in between services about reports of someone coming to our church with a gun. And I had a decision to make. Was I going to scare everybody in the room? Or was I going to get up and preach boldly? We have a lot of pressure on us as leaders. But if you look at the great leaders through history, nothing great ever happened—no movement really moved forward—without a leader who fully, absolutely identified with their cause. People can tell when you're just doing a job. People can tell when you're phoning it in. Is your heart really in it? Would you die for this thing? Is it what gets you up in the morning? Do you absolutely identify with the vision and mission you're dedicated to?

**Of course, this confidence that you have to possess needs to be coupled with humility.** It's an important balance to strike. When I think about it, here's what comes to mind. Last Christmas Eve, I preached at our church. And as any pastor knows, your crowd doubles in

size on Christmas Eve. So I showed up looking nice in a suit I wear twice a year, Christmas Eve and Easter. The place was crammed, and I'm delivering the best Christmas message you've ever seen. People are crying. Lives are changing. It was awesome.

So after these six or seven services, I'm feeling like the man. I'm so full of confidence at what I've just done. But when I get home, my wife says, "Hey we have this Christmas party to go to, and you have to wear this onesie as part of the theme." She presented me with these full, button-up pajamas that had this little bum thing on the back. They definitely weren't as cool as my suit. I'll spare you the details, but the bottom line is, when I put them on, they were too small.

So my family and I got in the car and showed up at this Christmas party. We knocked on the door and were greeted by a room filled with around 40 people. And I swear to you, not one of them was wearing pajamas. They were dressed to the nines. Nice drinks, nice food, nice clothes.

Immediately I looked at my wife like, "What's going on?" She pulled out her phone and read the text again. And well, she misread it. It literally said, "Make sure not to wear your onesies." But of course, it was too late for us. We couldn't go home, it was too far of a drive. So I sat at that Christmas party for three hours looking ridiculous in my onesie. Within hours, I went from the height of confidence to the depths of despair. It's how I think God chose to humble me that day.

That's the exact picture of the posture we need to have as the Church. We walk in with confidence like, "Man, we know the God of the universe. We actually know the plan of salvation." But we have to present that message with humility. We can't forget who we are in the picture. **Because that's what the world connects to: humility.**

- It's people who lead with a limp.
- It's people who let people in.
- It's people who aren't afraid to recognize and acknowledge their imperfections.

As you approach your strategy for reaching people, you have to understand that all of this forms down into method. Your method actually matters a lot. Some of us start to think that the only thing that matters is the message. So we spend a lot of time on our theology. We consider what we're saying and how we're saying it. But while the message is certainly important, the method matters just as much.

Let's go to chapter seven in Luke. Here, you encounter the Pharisees and this woman with a background. Maybe she's sexually promiscuous, maybe she's a prostitute. Whoever she is, she comes in and starts washing Jesus' feet. Of course the Pharisees are like, "Get rid of her! If Jesus knew what she'd done, He'd want her gone, too." But we all know that's not Jesus' method. Jesus looks at His disciples and asks, "Do you see this woman?" He's not asking if they have eyeballs in this moment. He's asking if they really and truly see her. Because if they did, they'd know that in that moment, she needs love. She needs to be extended grace, and love, and hope.

So often, we're so busy studying our Bibles that we don't take time to actually get up and do what it says: Tell somebody about Jesus! We know it, but we're not applying the methods. The Pharisees knew the Bible better than anyone. But what they didn't know was how to love someone else. They couldn't see this woman. They knew the message, but not the method.

And aren't we often the same? We know the message, but we don't spend time on the method. We don't spend time in the pragmatics of *how*. I have a friend who wrote an article at one point criticizing the way that I do video sermons. For context, at our church we use video sermons. People come in, I preach live at the 8:00 am service, and then all the other services are video. A screen comes down at all the other sites and has the sermon from the week before. This article was written by a guy I know on some famous Christian website critiquing that. Essentially, he asserted that it was wrong to preach on video. So of course, people start calling or emailing me. They wanted to know what I thought about his criticism. And if I'm honest, I'd tell you that it definitely was something I struggled with.

So, I called up one of my mentors and asked, "What do I do with this?" He said, "You know, Mark, there are people who sit around and like to just think up ideas, but here's the problem. I like the wrong way that you're reaching people better than the right way that he's not reaching people." And I've always remembered that. **Because sometimes we get hopped up about the wrong things. We let criticism of the method paralyze us and keep us from moving forward.** But we're reaching people, and that's what matters.

If we're all sitting around debating whether we can use video to reach people, we're all going to be irrelevant in the next ten years. We're having the wrong conversation. **See, to reach the post-Christian world that we find ourselves in, we have to be willing to reconsider and change our methods.** We have to be flexible, as leaders and as churches. Hans Küng, who's a great thinker, said these words: "A church which pitches its tent

without looking for new horizons, dies.” In other words, we need to always be striking camp. We need to be risky. We need to be experimental. We need to think about what Jesus told us to do: go catch people. If we want to be those fishers of men, we have to consider what we’re fishing with.

Sometimes in our methods of ministry, we can come up with stuff that we think is right. Even though there are very few “right” ways described in the New Testament, we think we’ve cornered the market on how to make disciples. But the reality is, the method is adaptable. It has to be if we want it to work in different contexts.

Think about fish again. We fish with bait for a reason. It’s what we’re comfortable with, and we know it works. But some of us love cherry pie. So we think that fish must love it, too. But if we put it at the end of the rod, it’s not going to work. Because you have to fish with what catches fish. You have to speak into the things we’ve been talking about. What’s the pain point in someone’s life that the gospel solves? Start there! I had a professor in college who said, “It’s a sin to make the Bible boring.” It should be anything but boring, right? If it’s a lot of yawning and people going on with their lives when we preach it, then something’s wrong.

The other thing we’ve got to do is be incarnational in people’s lives, but not compromised. I’ve heard someone put it this way: Theologically conservative, but culturally liberal. That may be the balance we’re trying to strike. And of course, we have to make room for grace in the Church.

The other thing Luke points in chapter seven is for this generation today. We’re facing a generation that is coming in a little messy. Probably 100% of them—men and women alike—have been exposed to pornography on some level. They’re sleeping around on some level. They’re already greedy and materialistic on some level. This culture isn’t a Christian culture. They don’t just need a tweak to their lives; they need an entire transformation of the mind. But in order to get there, we have to have grace.

### **We have to build a culture of grace into our churches.**

I remember when I started going to church and I was the chain-smoking guy. I started dating a girl in the Church, and everyone told her, “You have to run away from this guy.” I really loved Jesus and was following Him with my life, but everyone there was like, “No,

don't mess with this guy." I started going to Bible college, and a year into it, our pastor preached a sermon about not to be unequally yoked. A man in our church walked up to my girlfriend at the time (who ended up being my wife later!) and told her to break up with me. He said, "He's not a Christian, and you're unequally yoked. Didn't you hear that sermon?" My wife pressed him as to why he thought I wasn't a Christian and he answered, "Because I saw him smoking outside behind the Church." She answered, "Well, it's better than what he used to smoke!"

See, there's a fear that the Church is going to be a messy place if we reach non-Christians. But grace changes that. **You have to have grace to the point that you stop evaluating someone else based on where they are now. You have to evaluate them on where they've been and where they want to go.** Where did they start, and where are they going on the journey of sanctification in their life? Your church is going to have to be a place of grace for all people, even the ones smoking cigarettes out back every week!

The Church needs to be a place of this messiness because it's a place of grace. It's the place where the woman who washed Jesus' feet could come in and feel welcome. That's why I love that passage in Luke. I almost cry when I read it because Jesus essentially says that people who aren't forgiven don't have a lot. But the people who have been forgiven? They have so much because they feel that grace every single day.

Here's the other thing I think we have to do. **We have to raise the bar of discipleship for the culture that we're trying to reach.** Don't lower it. When we started our church in Canada, everyone said, "How are you going to reach Canadians that don't care about Jesus? I know what you should do. You should just go for the lowest common denominator. Do the soft sell of Christianity." That's the classic Canadian thing: just make everyone comfortable! But honestly, that sounded like a terrible church to me.

So I would just get up and preach for an hour and tell them to repent. I'd tell them that their lives were a disaster. And young people were showing up week after week for more. Why? Because they didn't want a soft sell. The more you raise the bar, the more people raise their lives up to the level that you're talking about. For example, when I do a giving pitch at my church, here's what it sounds like:

"If you're sitting here right now and you're a Christian, okay. I'm not talking to the non-Christians. But if you're sitting in my church right now and you're a Christian, and you don't give, stop being a cheap, non-contributing zero. Leave or start

giving. Do you think it's free to turn these lights on? Do you think my kids eat based on manna that falls from Heaven? Give money, because money is actually the telltale sign of where your heart is. Don't tell me what worship songs you sing for nine minutes over, and over, and over. Tell me what you do with your money, and I'll tell you what you worship. I'll tell you what you actually love. I'll tell you what your priorities are in life. And if you don't give sacrificially, you don't understand what it means to be part of the people of God."

That's my giving pitch. It's tough, and it's real. And you know what? People rise to the occasion because they don't want the soft sell. In order to reach the post-Christian west, we need deep people. We don't need people who prayed a prayer once and moved on. We don't need people who went forward at summer camp and never thought about it again. That kind of faith doesn't look bold. It doesn't look glorious to the world around you.

So what kind of Christians are you creating? What kind of disciples are you making? You have to raise the bar to create real disciples. Think about disciple Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who, in the face of the Nazis, just went for it in a real and authentic way. You think that kind of Christianity is born out of the lowest common denominator? Not at all!

So, how do you actually get people to rise to the occasion?

I read about one guy who spent time in Communism. He was a full-on Communist in the seventies and eighties. He was totally sold out to it. And then he went to a church and saw what it offered. And here's what he said: "Why do all these people think they're a small, powerless bunch? 'There's an impossible mission,' they say. 'We're fighting a big majority.' But the reality is, that was all wrong. They had huge numbers at their disposal: hundreds of thousands who believed this. Psychologically, it was killing them. The difference is so little is asked of Christians by their leaders, and so much is asked of Communists by theirs."

**People rise up to what they're called to.** This is about the Church being the Church. Mark Sayers points this out. He talks about the difference between what Communists would actually call people to. They had an entire ideology figured out. They would say, "The world is against us." They would recruit people who were willing to be trained. Up front, they would ask for huge levels of commitment and sacrifice, and people would embrace the unpopularity of it. Students of communism didn't want to be spoon-fed. They wanted to become teachers themselves. Students expected to put what they learned into



practice. It was a whole group of people saying, “There’s an ideology calling me to something.” But then, they came to a church that was like, “Well, hopefully we’ll be able to survive the culture wars. And hopefully we’ll see you next week. And do your devotionals.” That’s it. And that’s not the way we’re going to reach the post-Christian west.

**We have to do ministry with urgency.** Urgency is actually a value at Village Church. We’re a bit of a scrappy church. We’re in a bit of a Corinthians scenario here. Paul was writing to these messed up Christians gone wild. They’d come out of all kinds of crazy sin, and he’s trying to reach them where they are. He’s going, “Hey, here’s what you need to do,” with a real sense of urgency. In the book of Ephesians, we see a totally different Paul. He spent 18 months there loving all the elders. And in Acts, he’s hugging everyone, crying, and spending a ton of time there. Corinth was different. There, Paul’s a pioneer. There’s an urgency that’s pressing. And it’s that same sense of urgency we have in our call at Village Church. It’s the same urgency I think every church needs. Rather than settling all the time, we need to see ourselves as pioneers. We are in the world, but not of it. We are citizens of Heaven who are here in the present representing Heaven to the world.

But here’s the thing that we have to understand. We have to start looking at the results. Because if all we focus on is method or ministry, we’ll think that’s the end result. We’ll never look at the effectiveness of what we do. Someone once said to me, “Judge the fruit, not the watering schedule.” Think about that for a second. Can you imagine if your neighbor had a flourishing fruit tree? It’s awesome, it’s beautiful, and it’s amazing. But your tree? It’s not very good because you didn’t want to water it at a certain time every single day. This is what we spend our time doing in the Church. We judge the watering schedule of everyone else rather than the fruit being produced.

See, we have to come back to understanding our methods. Because our ministry is guided by both methods and messages. And we need to prioritize both if we want to reach the post-Christian world more effectively.

# Session 4: Notes

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



# Session 5

What does it look like to reach people in the post-Christian west? In this context of ministry, I think having some shifts in thinking and some core values are essential to guiding the way you work. Before we get into why, let's take a look at a passage from John that will help frame the conversation:

*“On the evening that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked, where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews. Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be to you.’ When he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. And Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I’m sending you.’ And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of anyone, they’re forgiven, if you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld’” (John 20:19-23 ESV).*

Here, you have this group of people who are scared. They don't know whether they're going to have an impact in the world. And I don't know about you, but I feel like that's a lot like those of us in ministry today.

There have been so many shifts in culture, and as a result, we're not sure as leaders whether we're going to have the same impact anymore. We don't know whether we're going to be successful and effective anymore at what we do. If that's you, the first thing I'd say is this: keep the faith. Resist the temptation we all have as leaders to not go deep or dream big for the Church.

Instead, think about what practices and values you need to have to help you keep going.

In a devotional I was reading recently, I came across this great, almost haunting analogy that I think is helpful here. There were a bunch of climbers going up Mont Blanc in the French Alps. Their guide told them, “I want you to leave whatever isn't necessary. You can't bring any unnecessary accessories with you.” Essentially, they could bring a little pickaxe, a backpack, and that's it.

But this one guy wanted to take pictures, so he decided that his camera and a couple of lenses were necessary, too. Then he brought cheese and wine because he thought that a picnic in the French Alps was necessary, too. But halfway up the mountain, the guide turned to him and said, “You've got to leave this stuff behind.” But this guy wouldn't let it go. So he said, “You know what? You guys just continue on without me. Head to the top of the mountain and then pick me up on your way back down.”

The writer of this devotional ultimately made this point. When people find out they can't make it to the top of the mountain with all their accessories, they give up the idea of reaching the peak of the mountain and decide to pitch their tent in the plains instead. And leaders, we do this all the time. We give up. We give up on the mission. We give up on the dream that God has given us. We give up on God Himself. And instead, we settle for a kind of life that's much smaller than what God planned for us.

We're climbing this mountain of ministry right now. And we have to figure out what we need to do to reach the top of the mountain. Not the one that existed fifty or hundreds of years ago. We have to figure out what mission, messages, and hacks that we need to bring with us today.

In your context, what does this look like?

I want to begin helping you figure this out by giving you a few ideas.

First, we have to meet the need. The reality is that the secular world hasn't delivered on this the way people thought it would. It's not giving to the human soul what it's promised to give. We all probably have friends and family who, when tragedy strikes, borrow from religion to declare, "I'm praying for you. I'm thinking of you." People are hungry for something that only the Church can give. So much so that, maybe without even realizing it, they're turning to what only the Church can provide.

The week after September 11th, Redeemer Church in Manhattan grew from around 2,000 people to between 5,000 and 6,000 people. Why? Because after that tragedy, people showed up at church to find what they were looking for. They were asking big questions that the secular world just couldn't answer. People were hungry in those moments of hardship, and they're hungry now. And so, the Church needs to have the confidence to be able to speak into the real questions that people are asking. We need to have confidence that we can meet that need.

We did a skeptic series as a church a few years ago where I answered these big kinds of questions. Questions about evil, suffering, hell, sex, the gospels, whether or not you can trust the Bible, science, and evolution. It covered all of these things that we think people don't care about anymore. In a postmodern world, we think they've moved on from stuff

like this. We grew by 1,200 people during that series, because these are the questions people are asking. There are evidential thinkers in the West. There are moralistic thinkers in the West. So you have to start thinking, “How do my events, podcasts, and series meet the needs of people where they are?”

At my church, we also do a skeptic’s forum. We do a hot seat Sunday where I let people text any questions they have about anything during worship. Then, my team will grab those and put them up on a screen. My job is to talk about them live on the spot. The goal isn’t to provide all the answers; instead, it’s to posture myself as someone who’s saying, “I’m one of you. I’m with you. So you can ask me anything, and I’m going to do my best to talk about it and try to point us toward an answer together.” If I don’t know the answer to something, I just say, “I don’t know.” It brings an authenticity to the moment. And as a pastor, authenticity helps me meet people right where they are.

Second, we need to actually create the space where unchurched and de-churched people will fit in before they’re ever even there. When I’m preaching, I still talk as a communicator. Even if I think I know every person in the room, I make space for those that I don’t. Because eventually, I want those people to be there.

What does this look like? Well, I say things like, “Hey, if you’re a Buddhist and you’re here, this is what you might think about this verse. If you’re a Muslim, if you’re agnostic, if you’re not sure what you think about any of this faith stuff, I’m glad you’re here. And here’s what I think this might mean for you.” I communicate in a certain way before those people actually start showing up, so that a certain DNA of expectation and invitation is in my church before they arrive.

In the same realm, you want to think about the communicator you’re putting on stage. At least 70% of the time, your best communicator needs to be the one speaking at your church. Every week, you need to try your best to deliver your best, because you never know when new faces with new questions and new beliefs are going to walk in the door. People are going to bring their neighbors. Friends are going to invite friends. And if they show up to a communicator who isn’t prepared or passionate about speaking to their friends, too, then they’re going to feel a little more reluctant to show up again. In a world of skeptics, a Sunday planned around gimmicks won’t work. But good, authentic communication will.

If you have it in your church's DNA to want to reach skeptics, you'll begin to program and plan your sermons and series with them in mind before they even walk in the door. You'll shy away from doing a 15-week series on something like the rapture or the prayer of Jabez because you know that isn't what they need to hear. They're thinking, "What are we talking about right now? My neighbor's trying to pay the bills, his marriage is falling apart, and the guy's addicted to drugs. But you're talking about the rapture for ten weeks? This is not stuff that anybody at my work is asking about. It's not even what I'm asking about!"

So, filter your Sunday morning content and communicators through the lens of the unchurched skeptic. Do it *before* they show up to your church so that when they do, it's part of the DNA of what you're already doing.

Third, we have to focus as leaders on discipling and equipping our people for ministry, both inside and outside the Church. We have to train them to grow, serve, and play their part in the mission that God has given them. And we have to help them figure out what that identity looks like for them.

What are their spiritual gifts? What are their passions? If you look at Ephesians 4:11-12, Paul talks about the idea that it's our job to actually equip the saints for the work of ministry. And then he kind of lays out this paradigm of apostle, prophet, evangelist, shepherd, and teacher. There's been a lot of work by people like Alan Hirsch, Michael Frost, and others talking about the need for the Church to function with these five roles in play. Otherwise, the Church just becomes a group of professionals doing ministry rather than a group of people—the priesthood of all believers—doing ministry.

In one of their books, Frost & Hirsch talk about the idea that these five roles are actually needed in the context of mission chronologically. The work of the apostle happens; they might plant churches or be over networks of ministry like missionary movements. And then the prophet does their work. The prophet speaks, calls to repentance, and preaches the word of God into a particular culture with prophetic critique and prophetic hope. And then the evangelist actually recruits people to come to know Jesus. And once those three roles have been done chronologically, you actually need a shepherd who settles in and actually shepherds, leads, and discipled these people. And they do so as a teacher as well. **The point is that every believer in your church understands their identity and their gift set, so that they're actually doing the work of ministry they've been called to do.**

The image that I've used in front of our church is a cruise ship versus a battleship. On a cruise ship, you know that everyone is sitting out, getting a tan, and sipping on things. And then there are certain people who are working. They come and serve these people who are sitting around doing nothing. And sometimes people see church the same way. It's almost like, "These people do ministry for me and I sit here and receive it."

But on a battleship, every single person knows exactly what their role is. They know what they're supposed to do. If they don't have a role in the ship, they're off the team. And honestly, this is what the Church is. It's a battleship, not a cruise ship. The Church is the place where you know exactly what your role is; you know what you're going to do to help the mission be accomplished.

One of the biggest things we do at our church is baptism. And every single time we baptize a new believer, everyone goes wild. They clap, celebrate, and rejoice at what God is doing. But then, every single time the celebration dies down, I look at my church and say, "This is awesome! Praise God! But how many of these people got baptized because of you? How many of your neighbors, family members, and friends actually gave their life to Jesus because of your influence?" Of course, we celebrate all the lives dedicated to Jesus no matter how they got there. But the question I want my people to consider is this: Has this burden really affected you? Has it helped you wake up and see your part in the mission? Has it changed the way you live your life?

Now, with those ideas in mind, I also think we also need to embrace some core values that we've adopted organizationally at our church in the hopes that they'll filter down to our people.

## **ONE: We Strive For Excellence And Innovation.**

Whether this is through art, media, technology, or whatever we're doing, we strive for excellence and innovation in ways that glorify Jesus and make Him known. From the beginning, we've made it a goal to do things with excellence. For instance, when our church was meeting online, I wanted to add some new element to the teaching. So, we got this app developer to basically build in a bunch of content so that when our people were watching the sermon on their phones, notes would come up about what I'm saying in the sermons.



With a click of the button, they could see who the worship leader was and discover a little bit more about them by reading their profile. They could see the connection to kid's ministry in my teaching notes. They could learn and see so much more about our church simply by using this app as they watched live online.

Was it worth it for our church to spend the time, money, and energy to create this better online experience for people? I think so. And not just because it was some cool, new thing, but because it allowed us to think innovatively in the way we reach and affect people through the technology that they're already using.

## **TWO: We Want To Teach Children And Youth About Jesus In Ways That Are Engaging And Life-Changing.**

If you want to reach a post-Christian world, you have to be able to focus on the children and youth growing up in it. You have to put your best communicators in front of them. Because as much as youth might show up to church because of fun games and a cool atmosphere, the reality is that fog machines, skinny jeans, and trendy environments aren't going to be the reasons they don't leave Christ when high school hits. They need to experience God and have an actual relationship with Him for that to happen. That's how their faith will last.

There was a study done by Harvard Business Review several years ago about politics, primarily focused on Democrats and Republicans. It was a fascinating study about why conservative politics tend to be able to survive in the midst of a culture that is seemingly more liberal in ideologies. One of the reasons they believe this happens is because conservatives tend to have more children. See, in order for an idea to still exist in 50 years, you have to seed it into the future. You have to plant it in the next generation. So if Christianity is going to survive in the next 50 years, we have to make sure our children love and embrace it.

C.S. Lewis pointed this out in *Screwtape Letters*. He said that when you become 40 or 50, you'll notice that it's the young that are more willing to die, simply because they got nothing to lose. They don't have mortgages or responsibilities yet. They're like, "I want to take the world for Christ, and I'm going!" They have an undeniable energy that we want to engage in a real way for the sake of the Church. Making that a value and priority at your church is huge.

## **THREE: We Want To Leverage Technology.**

If everybody you want to reach is online, make sure you're focusing on your online presence. This might mean putting your service online. It might mean adapting some of the things you do to fit online. I used to preach to a whole room, but when we started to focus on our online audience as well, I started to say, "Okay, why don't I sit on a stool, look right into the camera, and preach to the camera? Why don't we adapt a little for this online experience?"

We also did something called cinema sites, where we played the entirety of our services in movie theaters. We took the time to mix and produce it properly and then played it there to reach other people. Now, six of our eight sites as a church are in movie theaters, and people love it. They totally engage in it. And you know, at first people thought it wouldn't work. But we wanted to try—to innovate. It was one way we leveraged technology for the sake of the Church.

## **FOUR: We Need To Be Authentic.**

Rather than present ourselves as something we're not, we need to be authentic. We don't need to hide the fact that we're broken people in need of the grace of Jesus. We need to be real and raw with our people so that they feel permission to be real and raw with us. Authenticity is the best thing a leader has in this world. It's the thing most respected thing in our culture.

I have Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD). It's been a part of my life since I was a child. I used to have all kinds of habits that I obsessed over. They were things that I never talked to many people about; I just kept them to myself. But as an adult, I shared a little about them in a sermon illustration. A few days after that, a woman came up to me crying and said, "Mark, you have no idea. For the last ten years of my life, I've done similar things. I deal with this all day long. And I've never told another human being this, but your sermon changed that for me. I got in the car after church and told my husband for the first time."

My choice to be authentic as a leader gave this woman permission to do the same. Your authenticity as a leader, as a staff, and as a church will give your people permission to not be perfect. To need the grace of God in their lives. To actually be set free the way Jesus calls us to be.

## **FIVE: We Need To Focus On Evangelism And Discipleship.**

This means that we're equally doing church for both the Churched and the unchurched in everything that we do. We don't just want to focus on the Christians that are there, and we don't just want to focus on the non-Christians that aren't there. Instead, we have to think about both.

My family is agnostic; they don't believe in God at all. When my grandmother passed away, I remember all of us sitting around talking and one of my family members said, "At least she's not suffering anymore." I stopped and asked, "How do you know that?" It confused me because what they were asserting was a faith position—an idea that they knew what happened in an afterlife they supposedly didn't believe in. It was a simple question to challenge their presuppositions about what they think and what they know.

And I think we need to do the same in our preaching, teaching, and in our ministries. We need to ask big questions. But we can't do that without also being able to hit the heart issues of people's lives. You need the mind and the heart to be equally engaged. People think with their gut, right? Our gut tends to run our lives.

There was a book written a few years ago called *The Science of Fear*. In it, they talk about common fears like the fear of flying. Statistically, no one should be afraid of flying. It's the safest way to travel. But knowing that doesn't change much, does it? If your gut still tells you that you should be afraid, you're going to be afraid.

See, here's what James K. Smith said about it. He said that we can't change people with just didactic information poured into their intellects. We can't recalibrate the heart from the top down with merely informational measures. Instead, the orientation of the heart happens from the bottom up—from the gut. That's actually where change starts to happen. So in our ministries, our job is to get people to do more than just believe things about Jesus. From the gut, from the affections, that's what actually starts to change our life. So in ministry, the goal is for people to not just say to themselves, "Oh, I rationally believe Jesus. I trust the gospels. I think God exists." I think our job is to do something more than that.

I just preached through the whole book of 1st Corinthians. It took me about a year and a half, and I just took people verse by verse through the whole book. In the last four verses of the book, Paul says something that surprised me...

*“If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed” (1 Corinthians 16:22 ESV)*

Notice what he *didn't* say. He didn't say, “You're going to be accursed and under the judgment of God if you don't have faith.” What he did say was that if you don't love God, you'll be accursed. You might believe in Him, but you don't treasure Him. That's where the trouble is.

It's our job as pastors and leaders to show people that Jesus isn't just true, but that He's better.

He's better than any of the things they'll worship every day. That's our strategy: to show that Jesus is better. How do we do that? Well, we've got to show people God, in all of His goodness, because then people will recognize that He is a God worth loving. We've got to show people that He pursues them and will do anything to save them.

My wife and I were leading a marriage retreat one weekend, driving from Vancouver to Whistler where 300 people gathered to attend. We hadn't really had much time to work on our message. So as we're driving up there, she says, “Okay, what are we going to talk about this weekend? It's Friday. We got to hit some content.” I chimed in quickly and said, “Totally. This can be the strategy: I'll teach, and you just chime in every once and awhile.”

No, this was not a smart move.

In response to this, my wife simply said, “Wow... okay.” And then she proceeded to look out the window quietly. Every question I tried to ask was met with a one-word response. And we had more than two hours left on this drive! So finally, I did something I hadn't done in years: I turned on the radio. And I'm not kidding when I tell you the song that was playing was the one we danced to on our wedding night.

If you don't believe in the sovereignty of God, this reality should blow your mind! Here, out of the millions of songs that could be playing, it's this one. Right here in the middle of a silent and tense drive, God is reaching through the radio and saying, “We've got to fix this thing.”

Right then and there, I repented for the offense against her. She, of course, turned off the radio immediately and remained mad for a little while longer (and rightfully so!). But the point is, God used the craziest thing to pursue us in that moment.

And that's the message we want to give other people. God pursues us. In Matthew 16, Jesus asks Peter this simple question: "Who do you say that I am?" Peter's response: "You are Christ, son of the living God."

This is what I think we often forget in trying to reach people in this current culture. God is alive! He's still pursuing us. He's chasing us down in ways that we can't possibly fathom. He uses the little things in life—the stuff when we're not even looking—to find us. He's what an old hymn calls, "The hound of heaven." This is the God we serve! This is the living God we have the opportunity to preach to the world around us.

So, when you find yourself overwhelmed by all this stuff you think you need to do to reach the post-Christian West, remember this: You serve a living God who is still alive and working today. That's whose hands you are in. Trust your work to it. Build your ideas and values around it. You've got to trust that He will make you successful as you go. He loves you, He lives in you, and He's going to lead you as you lead others.

# Session 5: Notes

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



# Session 6

Engagement is the new church attendance and as a result, matters more than ever in the way we do ministry.

As a leader, you have to do whatever you can to deepen the engagement of the people who attend your church. The good news is, I truly believe if you raise the level of engagement at your church, you'll grow your attendance along the way.

Engaged people invite people. Engaged people are hungry for more. And engaged people want to share their faith with others. So by deepening your engagement, you're not only deepening the way you disciple your church, but you're also growing the reach and attendance of your church.

I get that this can be hard, because for years, we as pastors have focused on attendance. We asked, "How do we get more people in the room? How do we get more people to attend?" In a Christian world, that strategy worked perfectly. But in this post-Christian world, that strategy, as you've probably seen, fails miserably. **In the future church, attendance won't drive engagement, engagement will drive attendance.**

Here's why: engaged people attend church, and disengaged people don't. It's that simple. And as a result, in the future, the engaged will attend because only the engaged will remain. After all, people become most passionate about the things in which they're most involved. If I'm really involved in a cycling club, I'm going to get super passionate about it. If I'm not, I don't really care. That's because engagement fuels involvement, involvement fuels passion, and passion fuels invitations.

When you get people to engage in their faith, that begins to change everything. Think about it. You've seen this work in so many different ways in your life. You have friends who are really passionate about something, and that's why they invite you to join. That's why you have a friend who wants you to try that recipe, check out that sport, or try that new activity. They're engaged in it, and as a result, they got passionate about it. And because of that passion, they invited you. Engagement leads to invitation.

In the case of the Church, engaged people know what the mission is. They serve in it. They fuel it. They give to it, and they live it out. **In the future church of the western world, as we become more and more post-Christian, it will be engaged Christians who really advance the mission.** The nominal attendee—the person who sits in the back row with their arms crossed—they're not really going to grow your church. But the people who are actively



engaged in what God is doing in and through your church? They will. That's why the desire so many church leaders have, to focus on attendance and attract bigger crowds, is becoming increasingly misplaced.

Think about it. Over the long term in a church, you can accomplish far more with 300 engaged Christians than with 3,000 disengaged attendees. The disengaged group is going to dwindle over time, but those 300 people who are fully engaged? They will advance the mission because they're growing in faith and ultimately growing your church. Yes, only God can bring growth. That's 100% true. But God uses engaged people to help Him do it. As we've seen, early Christians didn't attend church. They were the Church, and that means they were engaged.

So now the question becomes, how do we deepen engagement in our own church today? What do we need to do?

I want to share with you five ways you can deepen the engagement in your church. Four of them are very practical; the fifth is a little bit philosophical and theological, so we're going to spend some more time on that one.

Ready? Then let's dive in!

## **ONE: Create A Clear Path To Involvement.**

The challenge for many people who participate in a congregation in person or digitally are that they don't know how to get involved. They show up to your building, but they don't know their next step. They watch your service online, but they don't know how to get involved once the online stream ends. Unfortunately, church websites aren't always helpful here. Because if people can actually find the site, they're often fuzzy on next steps. The same is true when church leaders give announcements or talk to people online—it's not always clear.

Often, during a service, we list 12 things people can do to get more engaged in their faith. The problem is, when they're faced with too many choices, most people end up choosing nothing. About 20 years ago, psychologists Sheena Iyengar and Mark Lepper published a remarkable study. They were attempting to track whether shoppers would get overloaded

by choice. On one day, shoppers at an upscale food market saw a display table with 24 varieties of gourmet jam. Those who sampled the spreads received a coupon for a dollar off any jam. Then on another day, there were only six jams for shoppers to choose from. Far fewer options, right? What's fascinating is that the larger display actually attracted more interest than the smaller one. It drew a bigger crowd. But when the time came to purchase, the people who saw the larger display were one-tenth less likely to buy than those who saw the smaller display.

What's the lesson? Fewer choices lead to more action.

Think about the auto industry. What have a lot of the big three automakers been doing? Narrowing their options. There used to be like five divisions of General Motors, and now they've cut way down. You go to Tesla, and they don't have divisions. Toyota doesn't really have divisions. If you want a mid-sized sedan, they pretty much offer one. But that limited selection actually produces more sales and more momentum.

The same is true with your church. **The clearer and simpler the path is toward engagement, the more people will travel it.**

At Connexus, where I'm the founding pastor, we even reorganized our lobby a few years ago to make the path to engagement simpler. We ditched the welcome desk for two simple kiosks. Right above one kiosk it simply says, "New Here." So if you're new at our church, you know exactly where to go. Then above the other kiosk it says, "Next Steps." There we have trained volunteers who act almost like concierges to help people discover the best next step for them at our church. Is it baptism? Is it serving? Is it joining a group? Is it Starting Point? And at every level, we try to take away the confusion.

So, my question is this: **What is your clear first step for a first-time attender?** If you can't answer that, you probably don't have one.

And if you can answer, then your follow up question should be this: Is it the best first step? For example, if your next step is a graduate Bible study in the Hebrew form of a book like Habakkuk, I'd tell you to step back and reconsider. You need something a bit more introductory for people! But if you have a clear and on-level first step for people to take toward engagement, far more people are likely to take it.

## **TWO: Focus All Your Ministries Around One Mission.**

When I started in ministry, I had an, “If you can dream it, you can do it” approach to ministry. What that meant is we offered every program that anyone on our team dreamed of. But about a decade into that approach, we scrapped it for a much simpler model. Why? Well, we already said that when people have too many choices, they often choose nothing. We didn’t want that to keep happening at our church. But we also changed for another reason: **We realized that what people become involved in becomes the mission.**

There are a lot of churches that have these programs that have been around forever, and you just can’t seem to kill them. The Tuesday Quilting Club, or The Men Who Eat Bear Meat Fellowship, or The Youth Who Love Pancakes Ministry. Sure, they probably served a purpose at one point. But now, they’re distracting from the mission. You have a hard time getting people involved in groups like these in the overall mission of the Church. They’re really passionate about quilting, or bear meat, or pancakes, or whatever they’re gathering around. But it’s a side mission, not the main mission of the Church. It’s not core to the mission of the Church. And if we’re trying to create disciples that follow Jesus, then you want them to be passionate about that mission. When you allow people to do whatever they want, they get passionate about their ministries, but they don’t get passionate about the ministry. And that’s a problem!

**Too many Christians get passionate about THEIR mission, not THE mission.** If they end up starting their own ministry within the Church, they’re going to be so focused on that ministry that it eventually becomes church to them.

Eliminating options and focusing on the things that authentically produce disciples of Jesus will help here. If you want people to be passionate about the central mission of your church, only do the programming that directly advances the central mission of your church. **When you say no to a hundred other missions, it allows you to say yes to the most important mission.** If the ministries that you offer are off mission, your people will be off mission, too. So narrow the options, pick a few good things that are core to the mission, and have the courage to make those changes.

## **THREE: Make It Uncomfortable Or Impossible To Stay Disengaged.**

You see, people eventually conform to expectations. Tell a child he’ll never amount to anything, and he’ll likely give up on the dream of college. Tell a child she can

persevere and accomplish what's ahead of her, and she'll likely be successful. People rise and fall to the level of our expectations. The same is true in our congregations.

**When you don't expect people to do more than attend your church, don't be surprised if all they do is attend your church.** We've got to get rid of the consumer language and consumer expectations that we've added to church over the years. Instead of telling people, "We're so glad you're here. Thanks for spending your Sunday with us," shift your language to say something like, "We're here to follow Jesus. If you're brand new, we're really excited you're here. Because we believe that God is the best thing for us, and we want to help you discover that." That simple shift away from consumer language will do great things. It will help you create your own language and your own culture that people will want to engage in.

Another thing you want to do here is really call people to action. Tell them that you want them to be involved; you want them to take a step. Let them know that you want them to serve, join a group, bring a friend, or give generously. What you're saying without saying it, is that you don't want them to just sit there. The goal isn't for them to just watch. The goal is for them to get engaged. To get involved. To do something with their faith.

## **FOUR: Challenge People To Serve.**

Here's what I've discovered in my time in ministry: People who serve in the mission are people who are engaged in the mission. Now, I know this is heresy in some circles, but encouraging people to volunteer may actually be more important than encouraging them to join a group. Ideally, of course you want people to join groups. That's a fantastic step! But what I've found in my own church is that our healthiest people are not the ones in groups; they're the ones who serve.

People who serve get the mission. They're on a mission and they love the mission. They're giving their free time for something that doesn't benefit them directly and they do it because they're engaged with the mission.

Don't get me wrong, I think that groups are really important. I'm a part of a group at my own church! But the thing is, groups can become something that's just about you. But serving? Serving is almost never about you. So while I think involvement in a group can certainly help with engagement in the mission, I don't think it can do that on its own.

Giving works in a similar way. It's so important! Because I really believe what Jesus said is true: "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Maybe you bought a brand-new Jeep for tens of thousands of dollars. What are you thinking about? Your Jeep, of course! You don't want it to get dented. You don't want it to get stolen. You want to drive it because you love it. The same is true if you start investing hundreds, thousands, or tens of thousands of dollars in the kingdom of God. When you do, your heart follows.

You really want people to get engaged in the mission? Invite them to do it in a way that works for your mission. To give, to invite, to join a group, yes. But first, I would say to serve.

## **FIVE: Craft Non-Downloaded Weekend Gatherings.**

We live in a new era of the hybrid church. The pandemic changed everything, and suddenly, churches that weren't online are now online. We're into this place where the Internet is increasingly a part of our lives. That was true long before Covid, but even more so now. And with the explosion of online options, social media, and podcasting, it's easier than ever to not be at church on a Sunday morning. What's left of the weekend gathering is morphing, and as a result, churches really have to think through what it means to be online.

I want to give you a couple of filters to think about here.

**First, is your in-person, gathered experience going to be a little bit different than what you offer digitally?** For a lot of churches, the answer is yes. Yes, we're going to produce a different version of the message or a different version of worship that we broadcast on our online stream. That's going to be our online presence. For other churches, they're going to be focused on simply streaming what's happening in the room. Honestly, I think you could argue for either option. The point I want you to think about is how you're giving people who attend your in-person Sunday gathering something different than they can find online.

Because the truth is, accessing your church online is a lot more convenient. You don't have to get dressed. You don't have to leave the house. You don't have to gather up the kids and you don't have to travel. It's basically 45 minutes to an hour of your morning versus several hours to actually engage in an in-person experience. And so that gives rise to the thought of how we make our in-person experiences what I call "non-downloadable experiences."

If you're watching something that's being streamed from the room, you'll think, "Oh wow, I can tell I'm missing something here. I can tell that if I were in the room, it would've been a better experience." Or, alternatively, if you're running an online service, you let people know that what's happening in the room is a qualitatively different experience.

**Second, focus on transformation, not just information.** Attractional church has seen thousands of people move into an authentic relationship with Jesus. The idea of attractional church is a big band, haze, a good series, and a good preacher that everybody gathers in the room to experience. Attractional church was the dominant model of church for the first 20 years of the 21st century. So please hear me say first that God used it in really powerful ways. A lot of good has been done through it.

But sometimes, so many of us leading churches like this, myself included at times, tend to simply share information about Jesus and Christianity when we preach or when we host services. Truth be told, there was a day when that was really helpful. But remember, now that we have full-on Internet access everywhere we go, we're drowning in a sea of information. People can find information about Jesus and Christianity anywhere.

Now when people show up to church, they're not looking for information. By the time they get in your building, click on your livestream, or watch your videos, they're not there to find information. They're hungering for transformation. People are looking for an experience with God and an encounter with God. Today, information is everywhere, but transformation is scarce. So many people who have been to church know about God, but not enough people who go to church regularly really know God.

So, what can you do? You can shape moments in your gathering that can become transcendent. Because God in His nature is both imminent and transcendent. Imminent means God is with us. God came as a baby in Nazareth; people could touch Him and see Him. And Jesus was actually God with us. God is very near; that's imminent. Transcendent means that God is bigger and holier than we can imagine. In the Old Testament, some of the prophets had a vision of God, and they fell down like they were dead. They say, "Woe is me for I'm an unclean person." See, that's the transcendent nature of God. Imminent means God is close. Transcendence means that He is also bigger than we can imagine. God, in His nature, is both.

Think about how we've done church. A few decades ago, as culture slipped away from church, we focused on the imminence of God, and that brought a lot of people back.

But the cultural shifts of the last decade have left people (especially younger people) longing for the transcendent. They are bombarded with information—bombarded by things that are close. They're feeling lonely, and they're looking for something beyond themselves.

The best future churches will create content that leans toward the imminent. It's understandable, practical, helpful, and digestible. And that's good, because being completely obtuse and incomprehensible doesn't help anybody. **But, in order to really reach and engage people in this post-Christian world, you'll also have to offer something transcendent.** Something bigger than themselves.

People are hungry for true community, for deeper experience, and for real transcendence. This is why churches that are growing are focusing more and more on creating experiences that engage more than just the head on a Sunday; they're creating experiences that engage the heart and the relationship. This can happen through music, which really allows the full range of emotions. This can be from a communication style and even a community that really leans toward authenticity, vulnerability, and connection between people.

In short, **people don't just want to know what's true; they want to know what's real.** And what's real is deeper than just an idea; it's an experience. I really believe that when somebody shows up at your church, they're engaging online, or they're engaging in the room, they're looking for something bigger than themselves—something bigger than all of us. They're looking for God. What a missed opportunity when they show up looking for God, but they only find us.

Give people what they're looking for when they show up at your church. Start to shape transcendent experiences, not just imminent experiences.

**And third, don't make everything you do accessible or downloadable online.** Church online is still relatively new. We're all trying to figure it out in many ways. How do you navigate the tension of having everything you do available both online and in person? If it's all there online, why would they ever bother to come back in person?

Fundamentally, the consumption of content is leaving people hungering for greater community, greater experience, and greater transcendence. So here's what a lot of growing churches are doing: They're offering experiences that, when watched online, leave you longing for the real, in-person thing.

So, what do you do to make sure you're providing them with the experience and engagement that they're longing for? **You want to move people quickly from anonymity to a sense of belonging.** You want to focus on engagement of the heart—not just the head—in the message, the music, and the overall experience. You want to offer more variety in your services than just three songs and a message.

Maybe you do some acoustic songs, maybe you open up some time for silence, or maybe you create space for prayer or another kind of response. You can facilitate a more passionate expression of worship. You can put more thought into the service to engage a variety of emotions and you can incorporate more space for prayer. The bottom line? Just think outside the box.

When you're planning a service, you can either manipulate or you can evoke. Your goal should be to never, ever cross the line from evoking to manipulating. Evoking says, "I had that emotion on the inside, and you brought it out of me." Manipulating says, "I tried to make you feel a certain way, and I felt kind of icky at the end of it."

Think about when you see a really great movie, a beautiful painting, or a lovely poem. It evokes a feeling that was already there; it just kind of pulled it out of you. That's the same thing you want to do with your service. Not manipulate, but evoke. Because ultimately, evoking draws people in. It's more than a downloadable experience.

If everything your church does in the future feels downloadable, then probably all you'll get are downloads. You won't find a lot of gathered people on the other side of a download. But, if what your church does authentically touches the soul, I think people will continue to gather. People are coming to church expecting to meet God, don't let them settle for less than that. If people feel like they miss nothing when they miss church, they're going to keep missing church.

Remember, in the future church, attendance won't drive engagement; engagement will drive attendance. Because in the future church, engaged people will attend, and disengaged people won't. Engaged people will remain, and the unengaged will move on. So our job as leaders and pastors is to do what we can to engage our people in the mission and message of our church. Yes, only God can bring growth, but He'll use the engaged people to do it.

Early Christians didn't attend the Church; they were the Church. And today, that's what we are, too.



# Session 6: Notes

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



# Session 7

I've got a question for you: What's the goal of posting content online?

For many years, a lot of us would've said consumption. Our obsession over attendance at church has now become an obsession with views online. Isn't it better if 100 people see your video rather than 10? Or 10,000 people rather than 1,000?

But remember, Jesus never said, "Attend me." He said, "Follow me." And honestly, attendance doesn't actually produce disciples; engagement does. And the same thing is true online. **You might have a video that nearly 10,000 people consume, but how many people will actually develop faith because of it?** If consumption is the goal, you might get stuck on that number and not see that the results beyond views aren't all that impactful.

But what if consumption isn't the goal? What if it could be deeper than that?

Here's what I believe is true: **The goal of digital content isn't consumption: it's connection and community.** Your heart should be to move beyond the number of views toward actually connecting with people in a meaningful, personal, and powerful way. It's not about the number of followers, the number of views, the minutes watched, or the likes and comments received. Sure, all of that is great, but it's not the goal. It's not the mission. The content in and of itself doesn't lead to engagement, but connection and community do. And that's what makes them the ultimate goal of your online content.

For years, we've operated in the old, attractional model that really dominated for the first two decades of the 21st century. With that model, the goal was always something like this...

1. Attend our church.
2. Watch and experience.
3. Like what you experience.
4. Come back again.

That's always what we hoped would happen. Well, as you may know, this approach didn't produce the results that we wanted. That's why a new model has to be adopted when it comes to online church. It has to be bigger than just, "Watch it, like it, and then watch the next video."

The problem is, most churches only think about the first step online. Churches consider the content, but they don't consider how that content will help connect people to

Jesus and to each other. Remember, we want that to be the goal of our digital content: connection and community.

To help here, I want to introduce you to the digital engagement funnel. It's actually an adaptation of what online content marketers have used for years. The digital engagement funnel is a five-step process I've created that will help you think through how people engage with your content—something that will move your online goals away from just consumption and toward connection and community.

## **ONE: Explore.**

The first step is called explore. This is essentially where people discover your church on social media. They find you on Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, or Facebook. They discover you, and because of what they see, they decide to explore. They want to know more. Maybe they hit up your website once, or they check it out over and over and over again. They're getting to know you as they explore more about your church. And while that's all great, you don't want their engagement to end there. Because if it does, you'll never really know them.

## **TWO: Offer.**

That's where the second step of this funnel comes in. This gives someone an opportunity to opt in and connect with you personally. It moves the viewer beyond simple exploration and toward something more real. And isn't that what we want?

## **THREE: Connect.**

When people take you up on that offer, they move to the third step. They connect with you in a way that lets you get to know who they are. Suddenly, they're not just a person behind a computer somewhere in the world. Now they're Jessica from Milwaukee who has questions about God, or Carey in Toronto who wants to find out more about your church, or Jake in Texas who is visiting for the very first time. It's the digital equivalent of shaking someone's hand in the lobby!

## **FOUR: Commitment.**

This one is tricky because you can't really control what happens here. You can facilitate the opportunity, but the step to commitment is something that's personalized to them.

## **FIVE: Share.**

Sharing can feel a little bit like that first step, but the difference here is key. This step isn't about you sharing with the world as a church; it's about the people who are engaged in your church sharing with their friends.

Now, here's the problem: most churches stop this whole process at step one.

They don't move beyond simply putting their content out online. And like we said, simply putting your content out there isn't enough. Why not? Well, it relates to the concept of scarcity. Scarcity is what drives value in our culture. The more scarce something is, the more value it has. Scarcity makes it worth something. When it suddenly shows up everywhere, it drives down the perceived value.

Think about how much technology has changed in the last several decades. While some of you may not even believe this, there was a time when your phone wasn't accessible in your pocket. Instead, your phone was attached to the wall in your home. It's what was known as a landline, and every home in North America had one. Local calls to people in your area back then were included in your phone plan at a flat rate. But if you wanted to call someone in another area, that was considered long distance. Anytime you wanted to call another city, another state, or even another continent, it was expensive. Because of that, your parents, grandparents, or whoever was in charge of the phone bill was always nervous about it. If, as a joke, you called Japan one day, you were grounded for a year because of the cost of that long distance call!

But then, in the late 90s and early 2000s, cell phones came along. And suddenly, phone companies realized that they had to make a pivot. What did they do? They stopped charging long distance fees. They made something that used to be very expensive into something that was cheap. Something that was relatively scarce became ubiquitous.

In a certain age of cell phones, companies decided to make their money by charging people based on when they used their phone. Companies offered weekday minutes, evening minutes, and weekend minutes. Weekday minutes were the most expensive because they were primarily used by business people for work. For most people, if a call came in outside of evening hours, you'd get a standard, "Hey, can I call you back after 6:00 when it's cheaper?" or "Can I call you on the weekend because I have unlimited minutes?" Eventually, as landlines sort of disappeared, cell phone companies realized that they didn't have to do this anymore. So they just included all the minutes at all times in the plan.

And then came text messaging. As texting took off, cell phone companies had to shift again. Suddenly, voice wasn't the thing anymore. So to make money, cell phone companies made texting scarce. You could buy a package of messages for a lot of money. After you used the allotted number of messages in your plan, you were charged for each additional one. It sounds crazy now, but at the time it worked. But again, as people started sending more and more messages and the technology evolved, text messaging became less scarce. It became part of the plan. It was included.

Next up, phones were accessing the internet through data plans. Companies began to include it in small amounts. You could get a certain amount of gigs, and if you went over, it would cost you. As we know, even data is now unlimited. It's far less scarce.

You see the point? Things that used to be expensive aren't anymore. And things that used to be rare aren't anymore.

The same thing happened in the music industry. Now, thanks to Spotify, Apple Music, and other streaming apps, you can choose any song at any time. That wasn't always the case, as you may remember.

This growth of streaming and online content has certainly impacted the Church, too. If you go back a generation, you had to attend a church in person to hear a sermon from a really great preacher. You had to be in the room at a certain time in a certain place to be sure you didn't miss it. Eventually, you had the option to purchase a cassette or CD from the ministry if you really wanted to break the bank. Or maybe you even got a friend to mail you a recording of it. Then the Internet happened. Suddenly, that content became available online. And in the last decade, it has accelerated greatly. Now, there are thousands of preachers online. There are really, really good pastors sharing really, really good messages all over the Internet. They're free, they're everywhere, and they're available any time you want to listen.

This was the case before the global pandemic hit in 2020, but it certainly accelerated afterward. Now, almost every church is online in some capacity because they had to be. More than ever before, people realize that they can access the top communicators in the world, anytime and anywhere, for free.

In this digital world, you have to ask yourself: What's our competitive advantage? If anybody can watch a message from any preacher at any church in the world, why would they choose a message from your church?

This is even more challenging for many churches because they're still primarily operating in an old era. They're still anchored in another decade. As preachers, we often tell ourselves that our church is different. We say, "We're preaching the word of God, after all. Isn't that enough?"

To a certain extent, that is true. But you need to remember this: There are thousands of other pastors out there also preaching the word of God. Their messages are available just like yours. Some of them may sound just like you; some of them may even be better than you (This one I've experienced a bit myself!).

I'm not trying to insult your preaching or beat down your spirits. What I'm saying is that I know how hard you work. I know how sincere you are. But if the model you're using to share your content and heart with the world is based on the belief that what you're doing is scarce, then you need a new model. Because things have changed.

What moved people to hear local preachers in the past will not be what moves them to hear you in the future. It may be hard to see, but trust me, it's very, very real. And that's the thing that's driving the patterns around your online content.

Let me reiterate: **the first thing you have to realize in this new era is that what you're pretending is scarce just isn't.** Your message isn't scarce anymore. The service that you're streaming isn't scarce anymore. Your content isn't scarce anymore. When you behave like something has tremendous value when it really doesn't, you not only confuse people, you lose people.

That's why you need a brand new approach to your digital engagement strategy. And that brings us back to the digital engagement funnel. In those first two steps, you find what I call rented space. What I mean by rented space, is that people find you in space online. They're randomly exploring the Internet and happen to find you. But you don't really own the Internet. People may find a message on YouTube and think it's really good. They may find a short clip on TikTok or on Instagram and think it's great. They may run into you on Facebook. That's awesome. But ultimately, you can't control how you get that message out.

You know what else you can't control? The algorithms. Let's say a small algorithm change comes out of Silicon Valley. All of a sudden, a video that would've gotten 100 views

he week before now gets 18. What do you do then? Well, you change your strategy. With those pivots, you kind of beat the algorithm for a moment. And then, they change it again. It's a cycle that you really have no control over in the end. **A successful strategy that got you somewhere yesterday may not get you to the same place tomorrow.** And that's because you're operating in rented space.

When you look at the third step, that's when the random and the uncontrollable becomes knowable. That's where you make it personal. That's where you get connected and then you can move into a more relational space. If you have someone's email address or phone number, this is where you can reach out to them directly like a friend. You can make a personal connection, and an algorithm can't control that.

Now in relational space, you obviously have to behave with some emotional intelligence. You don't want to email people five times a day. Instead, you want to build a relationship. As long as they want to stay connected with you, you have permission to speak to them. Seth Godin calls that "permission marketing," and suddenly in the relational space, you've earned their permission. It becomes this thing where you move from the randomness of the Internet to an actual real relationship.

If you want to think about this in very tangible terms, it's the same way that you would treat somebody who shows up at your church for the first time. Maybe that person sits in the back row and nobody knows who they are. So you try to make a connection with them, and then you work to build a relationship. Discipleship flows out of that effort.

But none of that discipleship can happen in the digital space if they don't find you, connect with you, and want to join your community. That's why the steps of this digital engagement funnel are so important for your church in an online space.

So, let's play this out.

**You have to start by creating engaging content that people love.** This is how they'll find you when they explore. The content could be some organic social posts where you share quotes, ideas, clips, informal videos, messages, and more. You could also do some paid social media where you assign a small amount of your budget to increase visibility and engagement online.

Another thing you want to consider in the explore state is the SEO, or search engine optimization, of your site. Say someone wakes up and types into their search engine



this question: “Is there really a God?” What SEO does is increase the chances that your website will be found amongst the search results. It increases your visibility related to certain words or phrases used in search engines. For example, I write a lot about church growth. One of the reasons my site has a lot of traffic is because of SEO. We’ve designed it in such a way that when somebody searches things like “church trends,” or “disruptive church trends,” or “church growth,” they find my site. And that’s what you want to happen with your church. There are a ton of resources out there to help you incorporate more of this into your website.

**People are probably going to check you out online before they show up in person.** You want your website to be accessible and well-done. The key pages on your site are your homepage, your about page, and your staff page. Your home page should give basic information about your church—service times, directions, when you’re streaming, etc. Then, the staff page shows them who you are. People want to know who are the people behind the Church. The about page should include information regarding what your church believes and how it operates. And of course, the primary concern for all of these pages is that the information is clear and up to date.

Then, your next step is to create the offer. You’ve probably seen this all over the Internet. You go to any website and get a message like, “Before you leave, sign up for this newsletter,” or, “Get your free quote here.” That’s an offer. It’s an exchange of something of value given for free in exchange for your email. If you give out your email address, you’re going to get something of value in your inbox. It’s part of the offer.

The secret here? Make it good. If somebody gives you their email, they’re taking you up on the offer to connect with them. You don’t want to take that lightly. Don’t spam them or give them something of little value, or they’ll likely unsubscribe. You really want to over-deliver here. Ask yourself: **What would be helpful to someone I want to get to know?** If somebody has been watching your messages online, what would you want them to have next? Maybe it’s a free mini-course, an e-book, or access to an old message series. Whatever it is, make sure it’s something of real value to them.

Now that they’ve taken you up on the offer, they’ve moved from being anonymous to being someone you know. They’ve moved to connection. And now you have an opportunity for follow-up. You can email them. You can message them. You can, with their permission, call them. You can extend an invitation. You’re moving from connection into relational space and that’s where discipleship can start. Hopefully, they’ll take a step toward engaging and growing in faith. And then, hopefully they’ll begin to share with others.

What's so powerful about the fifth step in the engagement funnel is that it's very different from the first. When you share about yourself as an organization, the algorithm doesn't favor it. Why? Because the tech companies behind it want to make money. They want to force you to pay to boost your posts to be seen. **But when somebody in your church shares about your church, the algorithm favors it.** It gets more favorable attention online. And that's what gives you an opportunity to be seen or to even go viral.

The invited become the inviters. The newest people are the ones who are passionate about your content, and the algorithm favors that kind of personal connection. You get the network effect because if someone who heard your message shares it, another person will likely see it and share it. Then the cycle continues, creating a network effect.

That's where the power is online. If you will engage all five steps of the digital content funnel, you'll see growth in new ways. Ultimately, consumption doesn't lead anywhere promising. Connection, however, can lead to both Christ and His community. And churches that finish the funnel, facilitate changed lives.

When you produce content, you're not done when you post it. In fact, you've just started. Because the goal of digital content is connection and community, not consumption.





# Session 8

I have a question for you: Do you still watch live TV?

I'm not talking about the Superbowl, an election, or some kind of world event. I don't mean that golf tournament, hockey game, football game, or whatever special event you don't want to miss. I mean the rest of TV. The shows you catch every week. Are you watching those live?

You may not be old enough to remember this, but there was a time when you had to tune in at a very specific time to watch the newest episode of your favorite show. Friends, Seinfeld, ER, or even the early days of *The Office*—you had to be there to see it live. If you wanted to catch *The Office* in its first couple of seasons, then you had to be there Thursday night at 9:00 pm. Otherwise, you missed it.

Here's a surprising truth: In the age of Netflix, Hulu, Amazon Prime, and Disney Plus, churches still behave like cable TV did over two decades ago. You either tune in live, or you don't count. Meanwhile, for the last decade and more, culture has operated like Netflix and YouTube on Demand. There's a disconnect.

Most churches say, "Don't miss this weekend. Be there at 9:00, 11:00, or catch our livestream." While that's great, it isn't meeting people where they are. It's not the future. We're live streaming our services or we have a live broadcast, but basically, it's just a repeat of cable TV that we've adapted to digital.

Look, I love it when people tune in live, too. I love it when people are in the room for our services. But in many ways, that's a bit of an antiquated model. Think about the music industry for a moment. Can you imagine if Drake, Taylor Swift, or Ariana Grande focused exclusively on release days? What if they told fans, "If you don't listen on the Tuesday that I release my album, then you won't be able to get my music anywhere." They'd never do that, because it doesn't make sense.

So, here's the question: **Does your church still act like cable TV in the age of Netflix, Disney Plus, and Hulu?** I'm afraid that for a lot of churches, the answer is yes.

I've been creating content since I was 16 years old. I walked into a radio station shortly after my 16th birthday, asked them to hire me, and they did. I became an announcer before I did some work in television and eventually in the Church.

Now I'm a podcaster and blogger, too. I speak at conferences, events, online, and more. So basically, if you look at the last four decades of my life, it's been all about content creation.

I care so much about this subject, especially for the Church. That's why I want to talk about a new model for content creation and delivery.

To do that, let's talk about the old model first. The old content creation model was pretty simple. First, you created. You went into a writer's den, your favorite spot, your office, or a studio, and you created the content. You worked on your talk, your sermon, your message, and that was it. The content was created. For years, that's what I did. I wrote my message in isolation or consulted with the team, and then I delivered it on Sunday morning.

Maybe you were smarter than I was at the time. If you were, you probably took time to get feedback before you delivered the message. Maybe you called your team together a few days before to say, "Hey, here's my idea for Sunday. Any thoughts?" Maybe they gave you some tips to improve your content, and you shaped it up a little more before the final delivery on Sunday morning.

That brings us to step two: reveal. At this point, you've prepared, prepared, and then prepared again. Then it was time to reveal the work. You got up in front of your congregation and delivered your talk. After all the work you put in to create it, now you released it out into the world.

And then, step three. This is where the real tragedy is. You abandon it. You never think about it again. You worked for hours on your sermons. You delivered it a few times on a Sunday morning. And just like that, you moved on. Why? Because next Sunday was on the horizon, and you had to get to work all over again.

My friend Rich Birch says this, "No one is better than the Church at pouring hours into creating amazing content and then never thinking about it again." You know it's true because you've faced that tension before! Maybe you wrote a really great series on prayer two years ago, but you think you can't use it again. Those ideas are done, right?

In our old way of thinking, sure. But this strategy doesn't work the same way anymore. Once the Internet came along, everything changed. And here's the bottom line: **People prefer great content over new content.**

Think about this! You know it's true because you live this way yourself. Take *The Office* for example. Even though it went out of production years ago, it's still one of the top-watched shows in the world. You aren't worried about the content being old or dated when you flip on *The Office*. You just want to laugh. So, you pick a really good episode to watch—and you know it's good because you've seen it before—and you turn it on. The same is true for *Star Trek*, *Friends*, *Seinfeld*, etc. (the list could go on and on). You aren't always choosing new content; you're choosing great content.

Here's the application for church leaders. Spend some time going through your archives. **Optimize some of the really good content that you've done in the past.** Why? Because people prefer great content over new content.

If you're like me, you've produced a lot of content over the years. And that means that it's not all great. They're not all gems. Some of your series need to stay in the archives! That's true for all of us. But maybe there's a really great parenting series you did, or an amazing study of *Psalms*, or one particular Easter or Christmas series that really worked. You don't have to abandon that content just because it's been done before. If people connected with it before, chances are they'll connect with it again.

The content you produced last year is probably still relevant in a lot of ways. Maybe you preached a series on sex, addiction, pornography, or relationships two years ago. Well, I can promise you that everywhere in the world today, people wake up with questions about those things. **When you create content that deals with human issues—spiritual issues—you can trust that those will be issues that people always have.** People will still have those challenges today. And once you understand that as a church leader, your potential to reach, help, and disciple people soars.

Still not sure that old content can produce new momentum? Let me share this story with you. Mike Todd pastored a small church of 200 in Tulsa back in 2015. By 2017, the Church grew to about 400 people. The year in between, 2016, he did a series called “Relationship Goals.” At one point, Mike made a strategic decision that caused some problems. He decided to invest about \$80,000 in camera gear. People got mad. Some got so mad that they left the Church. But Mike felt sure that this was the right move. Why? Because he had the idea that maybe in the future, more people would access his message through the lens of a camera than being in the room.

Now remember, his church wasn't very big at the time. So it seemed like a risky decision. But when Mike posted the “Relationship Goals” series to his social media platforms, something happened. And actually, I want him to tell you about it...

*“It was in late December that this young lady we’ve never met who doesn’t go to our church posted a two-minute clip from ‘Relationship Goals’ to her social media feed. I did this series in August, and here she is sharing it four months later. After I bought that camera equipment, nothing happened from it for two and a half years. We would post our messages from Sunday on YouTube, and about 100 people would watch outside of our church. Most of them were probably my mother; she was just happy for me. But then this girl posted this clip in 2017, and somehow, nearly 2 million people watched it in 48 hours.*

*It was completely insane. People just started sharing it and being impacted. And we went from 1,800 YouTube subscribers to 100,000 in less than 45 days. And the thing was, we didn’t even really have a great working church website at the time. So when people saw that clip and wanted to hear more, they searched ‘Michael Todd Relationship Goals’ and found an entire eight-part series online. So they started binge watching it and then moving on to other sermon series we’d posted there. I mean, we had two and a half years of content just waiting there for them because we’d been posting it online the whole time.”*

What Mike just illustrated is the power of using on-demand and existing content to further your mission. He went on to repurpose that content into a book that became a #1 bestseller on The New York Times list. He taught the series again at his church in 2020, and it got millions of views. And that’s because he was willing to take a risk and believe that great content has a purpose. It doesn’t go out of style.

When I was starting as a leader, I thought, “Well, I’ve said it once, so I can’t ever say it again.” Listen, learn from my mistake: you can absolutely say it again! Dave Ramsey is a great example of this. For decades, he’s been saying the same thing over and over again. In interviews, on podcasts, on the radio, and from stage, his message has been the same. That’s because he knows that people are still waking up every single day and thinking, “How can I pay off this debt?” And when they go to the Internet to look for help, they find Dave Ramsey. He’s been preaching that message for years, and in doing so, he’s been able to help millions of people get out of debt.

In the same way, you have something similar in your audience. The people in your community are facing the same struggles, year after year after year. They’re asking the same questions every single day...



- Where is God when I'm suffering?
- If God is good, why is the world so hard?
- Does God hear me when I pray?
- How do I break these addictive patterns in my life?
- Where can I find help in my relationships?

**You have the same dynamic at work in your church, and that means the content you preached two years ago will still ring true today.**

I want to introduce you to a new content creation model I've embraced that I think could help you, too. It will get rid of the create, reveal, and abandon model that's killing so many churches right now. This new model will actually show you how to create content that you know in advance will connect with even more people.

Let's dive in!

## **ONE: Create.**

Okay, so this first step sounds familiar, right? Trust me, the approach is different. Instead of writing a 40-minute published talk that you give once, here's what you do. **Start with an idea.** Just a bite-sized sentence, a small post, a thought, or an idea. No more than a paragraph. It could be as simple as, "Judgment is a terrible evangelism strategy." That's all you have to create in this step.

## **TWO: Test.**

Then, you'll take the idea and test it by putting it out for the world to respond to. Maybe post a 30-second video of you talking about the idea. Share a little on Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, or Facebook, and see what happens. Because it's just an idea, the investment in the content doesn't have to be high. You're not producing some high-quality video: just get out your phone and shoot. Post your idea and see what happens.

## **THREE: Monitor.**

The fun part about the Internet is that it gives you real-time feedback. It gives you likes, shares, comments, and opinions right away (for better or worse!) The truth is, the Internet doesn't lie.

I posted something recently online that simply said, “Ministry is a series of un-grieved losses.” I was so surprised a few hours later to see that it had more than 1,000 likes. I didn’t think it was all that great to be honest, but putting it out there let me know that it resonated with people. You may share an idea that will really speak to and connect with people. Or maybe you’ll get feedback that tells you otherwise. Either way, monitoring the response will help you know how your audience feels.

## **FOUR: Revise.**

If your idea doesn’t totally land, do you just throw it out? No, you revise. You keep what resonated. You keep what works, and you consider how to revise what didn’t. Maybe you express an idea differently and it suddenly lands. Or maybe you try it three different ways. I’m not talking about hours and hours of revisions. I’m saying spend a matter of minutes with yourself or your team reconsidering and revising your ideas, and then testing them again until you find something that really sticks with your audience.

## **FIVE: Deliver.**

Then, you craft your message. You take the idea to the stage. You unpack it. You use all the research, feedback, and time you spent developing the idea, and you put it into words for your people.

Now, in our old model, you’d end it right here. This would be the finish line: you’d drop the idea after this. But in this new model, there are more steps.

## **SIX: Repurpose.**

Instead of abandoning what you’ve created, go back to step two. Test it out in a new way and repurpose the content. How can you do that?

Take snippets of what you created and share it on all your channels. Take that 40-minute message and post it to YouTube. Then, post a few shorter clips, anywhere from one minute to five minutes. Grab some highlights from your message and post them separately. Once again, monitor the feedback. See what’s resonating and what isn’t.

## SEVEN: Amplify.

Remember, the Internet doesn't lie. It gives you real-time feedback. Some of your ideas may go viral. Some of your content will continue to help people long beyond the Sunday you originally shared it. The ideas that seem to really work are the ones that you want to amplify.

This content lives on the Internet, so you can use it to reach new people. Go back to the digital engagement funnel that we talked about in the previous session. You can connect with the people watching your three-year old message today. Amplifying the great content you have will help people find you, and in turn, that will allow you to potentially connect with them.

People prefer great content over new content. The stuff that you created years ago can still connect with people in big ways today. Going forward, you can feature both your new content and your best content online. And again, when people start sharing it, great things happen, connections are made and lives are changed.

I know this sounds simple, but I can promise you that this is a liberating approach to your content. **It will make you a better preacher and a better communicator. You'll know what's resonating before you drop it.** And you'll be able to use that content to make real connections with the people who find it.

Break the addiction to new content, and get people to connect with great content. Stop acting like cable TV in a Netflix world. **Stop abandoning your best ideas as soon as you release them.**

Create, test, monitor, revise, deliver, repurpose, and amplify. This cycle will lead you to be much more effective, both in person and online. Your mission will go further, and you'll accomplish far more in less time.

# Session 8: Notes

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



# Session 9

Believe it or not, we're actually going to talk about what happens when people show up in-person at your church! That's right, your digital presence and content can actually lead to you connecting with people in-person at your church.

So I want to focus on the Church building here. **If people *do show up* after connecting with your digital content, then you want to make sure you're making the right impression.**

That's why I want to share some best practices for first personal contact. When somebody who's been watching you online says, "I'm ready to join you in person this week," what can you do to make sure their first experience is a good one?

When people show up, if they don't have a great first-time or even second-time experience, they're not coming back. This is so important because often, the barrier to people experiencing Christ isn't scriptural or cultural—it's us. We get in the way of people coming to know Jesus. And none of us want that. So I want to show you how to get rid of that barrier. Let's remove it so that people will stick around long enough to get to know Jesus!

Now, I know that you might be thinking, "Our church doesn't have a problem with this." I get why you may think that. But can I let you in on a secret? **The people who give up on your church rarely tell you about it.** They just give up. They leave. They walk away. They don't rage, leave a note, or make a scene. They just leave and don't come back.

A lot of churches think they have a backdoor problem. I know I did! When I was the lead pastor of Connexus, I was convinced that we had people leaving all the time. So we hired a consultant, Tony Morgan. Tony helped me see that we didn't actually have a backdoor problem: we had a front door problem.

In my mind as a leader, I wanted to see 100% of the people who visited our church stay at our church. But of course, it didn't work that way. If you think about it, life doesn't work that way. You don't go back to the same restaurant every time you eat. You don't take the same vacation every single time. You don't only shop at one store. The same is true with church. It's normal for people to visit and move on to see what else is out there.

So for the most part, we weren't having a problem with people leaving out the backdoor. Our problem at Connexus in that season was a front door problem. We just needed to get more people in the building.

Now, there's some math with this. **A good rule of thumb is that to keep growing, you need as many first-time guests in the course of a year as you have attending your weekly worship service.** If you have 100 people on average worshipping each Sunday in your building, you need to have 100 first-time guests walking through your door in the course of a year. If you have 1,000 weekend attenders on average, you need to have 1,000 first-time guests that year.

That math is actually a breakdown of some data from Gary McIntosh and Charles Arn's book, *What Every Pastor Should Know: 101 Indispensable Rules of Thumb for Leading Your Church*. The typical growing church sees about 20% of its first-time guests become part of the Church. I know that in our minds, we want it to be 100%. But the reality is, it's not. A growing church sees 8 out of 10 people not come back. **Only 2 out of 10 people come back and actually become part of the Church.** A stagnant or declining church sees about 10% of its first-time guests become part of the Church. So the difference between a growing church and a stagnant church is only 10 percentage points.

Moving on from first time guests, growing churches see 40% of second-time guests become part of their church. That means that if people stick around beyond a first visit, the likelihood that they'll become part of your church doubles. And if they come back a third time, it triples. That's huge!

So, the question is this: How do you get your first-time guests to come back?

Before we dive into specifics, take time to think about how you behave when you're a first-time guest. Let's put ourselves in their shoes. You've been to restaurants, hotels, stores, or destinations as a first-time guest. And in that situation, you had a reaction. Likely it was one of two things: "Oh my goodness, I loved it, and I can't wait to come back." Or, "We're never going back there ever again!"

What's the difference between the two? It likely depends on the place. Take a restaurant for example. If the food was cold, the service was bad, or the place was dirty, you're probably not going back for a second meal. My wife has a rule that if the bathroom is dirty at a restaurant, it probably means the kitchen is, too. She's probably right. On the other hand, if the meal was amazing, the experience was top-notch, and the staff made you feel comfortable and served, you're not just going back: you're going to tell your friends about it, post about it online, and recommend it to other people.

Unchurched people are having the same responses to your church. Some of them have walked in the front door, felt at ease, had a great experience, and can't wait to

come back. And others? Well, they never plan to see the inside of your building again.

If that's the case, how do we make sure we have fewer people in the latter category? How do we create a great first-time guest experience for all people?

Maybe you've heard it said that the service starts in the parking lot. I get that! Bad experiences can start as soon as someone pulls in. If they can't find a space, the direction isn't clear, or there are potholes in the parking lot that almost take out a tire, it's not going to create a great first impression.

But do I think that's going to be the reason they never come back? Honestly, no. They might not even make it to your parking lot if you don't get your online experience and presence right.

As we've said so many times so far in *The Art of Reaching*, your service now starts online. The guest experience begins on your social sites, your live stream, or your website. So that's exactly where we're going to start.

## **ONE: Treat online like your front door, because it is.**

Everybody you want to reach is online. Your digital platform can scale in a way that your physical church cannot. So you need to have a great online presence. How do you do that? Well, much of this is in your approach. Approach your online presence from the mindset of a guest. Start with your website. Design it with a guest, not a member, in mind.

- Is the mission of your church clear?
- Is the site uncluttered?
- Are the service times and locations prominent?
- Do you have a clear call to action that asks guests to plan their first visit?
- Are you reaching out to families, singles, and community members with information that's specific to them?

Whatever you say online, make sure that you're saying it to your guests first. Have them in mind when you write the content and choose the pictures. Post photos of people who look like the people you're trying to attract. Then, make sure your messages are accessible and easy to find. Make sure they can see the faces of your leadership and get to know the people behind the Church. **Consider every page of your website through the lens of your guests.**



Then, do the same with your social media. Don't just use your social platforms to speak to your current members. It's more than just a place for announcements and information. Instead, use it to engage with potential guests. Share encouragement, inspiration, and Scripture. Ask questions that start conversations. Offer to pray for people. Let the people who are following and engaging with you know that you see them and let them see themselves in the story you're telling online.

I realize that social media can be a full-time job. For many of you, there may not be a budget to hire someone to run this for you. That's okay. Whether it's a volunteer or a hired position, just make sure that whoever is in charge of your online presence can connect with your congregation and new people. Someone in his or her twenties or thirties is great for this role. Why? Because they grew up as digital natives in a way that us older folks didn't. They have so much more natural aptitude for this.

And finally, **make sure that whatever you're promising guests online is what you'll actually deliver in person.** If your website or social feed is all hipsters drinking cold brew, then that's what your guests think they're going to find when they show up. So if your church is filled with senior citizens on a bus trip, that better be what you're posting! You want to make sure that when people show up in person, they recognize the place they found online. And honestly, it could be weeks, months, or even a year before they take that step to physically come to your building. That's why your presence online is crucial to the first-time guest experience.

## **TWO: Offer Great Parking.**

Now to the physical experience. Your front door is your online presence. But when your guests finally arrive in person, you have to make an impression where it used to start—in the parking lot. Think about your guests who are driving in and looking for a place to park for the very first time. Are there enough spaces? Is it well marked and easily accessible? Do you have spaces reserved specifically for first-time guests? Whatever you can do to make parking easy and accessible for your guests is key.

Make sure you instruct your staff to park in the back. Not because you don't care about where your staff parks, but because you want them to support the mission to cater to first-time guests. You want them to want your guests to have the best spaces, too!

And of course, put some of your best people in the parking lot to greet and help your guests. On rainy days, greet them with umbrellas. If it's snowing, have someone ready to help them into the building. The goal is to make their first impression on your property a great, welcoming one.

### **THREE: Recruit A Guest Services Team That Likes People.**

Many churches advertise that they're friendly, but usually what that means is friendly to each other. They're not always aware that they don't make a warm or friendly impression on outsiders.

Years ago, a small church asked me to be the pastor. I visited and preached there one Sunday. After the service, I headed down to the basement with about 20-30 people to get to know the congregation. I stood there with a cup of coffee in my hand, surrounded by two circles of people. I was completely on the outside: no one opened up or even talked to me. So when my family and I left, we knew it wasn't the right place for us. If I couldn't break through their cliques, how would anyone else break through who was visiting for the first time?

The truth is, people have that experience all the time. None of us do it on purpose: it's natural to gravitate toward the people you know or feel comfortable with. But where does that leave the new people? On the outside. **So, you need to find greeters and guest services team members who really know how to go out of their way to make a first impression and connection.**

My rule for guest services is always this: **greet people the way they want to be greeted.** Of course, now that we live in a post-pandemic world, this has changed a little. But in most normal circumstances, people want a warm greeting. Even if you're a little bit more restrained (like me), you want to be seen. Your guest services people should be able to read the room so they don't under-greet or over-greet somebody. Recruit people who you trust to make that first impression.

This goes beyond just the initial greeting. Think about the last time you went to a grocery store. Maybe you asked an employee, "Hey, where are the chips located?" If they answered vaguely and just pointed in a random direction, you probably didn't feel all that helped, did you? But if they took the time to walk you there and show you the chips themselves, you probably felt appreciative. The same is true at church.

**When someone asks your team for help with something, make sure that your people will go the extra mile.** Rather than pointing them in a general direction, have them say, “Here, let me take you to that ministry area and help you get settled in.” That kind of commitment will help your guests have a great first experience.

## **FOUR: Craft An Easy Check-in For Kids.**

A lot of people you’re going to reach at church are coming with their kids. When they show up, you want them to trust your process for taking care of their kids. And you want the experience to be easy.

At our church, kids’ check-in line can get long. Often, we ask regular attendees to check-in online and leave the in-person line for new families. We’ve also created an express line for new families. Think Chick-Fil-A drive-thru here! Before you’ve even gotten to the window, someone has approached you and taken your order. Have your volunteers in the kid’s ministry do the same. Approach those new families in line, ask all the questions, and get all the information. Make it personable and easy for them as they leave their kids in your care.

Ask anyone in the hotel industry, and they’ll tell you that check-in is key. In the last 40 years, check-in times have dropped from 4 minutes to 40 seconds. Why? Because people don’t like to wait. Chick-Fil-A has mastered this. They now have triple the amount of cars moving through their drive-thru lines and double the amount of people working it. Why? Because they know that people are buying speed as much as they’re buying their lunch.

This is how our culture operates. Like it or not, this is the expectation people have when they come to your church. So if you can make it easier for new people with kids to check in, you’re going to have more of them come back.

Speed and ease aren’t the only priority: safety is key. **While our tendency as leaders may be to focus on things like curriculum, theology, and programming, those aren’t the first things a parent wants to know. They’re thinking about safety and security when it comes to their kids.** Are the facilities clean? Who are the volunteers, and who’s in charge of them? How do they know who can come in and out of the environment? Who is with their kid when they’re not?

Don’t minimize this area of your budget. You want to put money into your facility and staff in this area. One of the most sought after and difficult positions to fill in the

church today is the Next Gen Director—somebody who looks after all of your kids and students. It's a very complicated role. Sometimes there are dozens, hundreds, or thousands of volunteers under this one person. There's so much safety and security involved. It's so, so, so important for you to invest in the right person! Don't cheap out on that. Because if a parent has a bad experience when it comes to their kid, they aren't coming back. It's as simple as that!

Remember, you're helping form the faith of a child. So do what you can to remove any and all barriers. Create a process, an environment, and a team of people that a parent can feel secure leaving their child with.

## **FIVE: Make Sure Your Welcome Is Actually A Welcome.**

When you use the time to welcome new guests from stage, make sure that you're actually welcoming them. Avoid the temptation to make it your moment for announcements. Doing this isolates and leaves out first-time guests. If you do make announcements, only announce what applies to new people or everyone. Keep guests in mind.

Create a simple step for them to take. It doesn't need to be a laundry list, but rather one clear step to get involved or connected. Be sure to keep both your in-person guests and your online audience in mind.

## **SIX: Design Your Services With The Guest In Mind.**

Remember, this is the lens you want to use to look at everything in your church. Design your services across the board with guests in mind. To do this you'll need to limit insider language or acronyms. And you'll need to speak clearly, plainly, and simply, so that everyone can understand. You may have names for your programs or environments that mean a lot to you, but they mean nothing to your first-time guests. So when you're talking about them from stage, over-explain. Describe them in ways that are clear to the person who has never heard of them before.

When it comes to the service, this is my suggestion from experience, although you may disagree: don't do a lot of songs. New people don't want to sit there for 45 minutes of songs they don't know. Things you can do? Mix up the styles of music you play. Incorporate new, engaging songs along with old, familiar ones. But keep guests in mind so that you don't overdo it.

When it comes to the message itself, assume intelligence but not background in your audience. For example, don't assume that everyone knows the story of Jonah, or Moses, or Abraham, or even Jesus. That may not be in their background. But you can assume that your guest is smart. Give them a quick rundown to fill in the background, but do it without insulting their intelligence.

Let's say that you're preaching on the life of King David. You might say, "We divide the Bible into two halves: the New Testament, which is the part about Jesus, and the Old Testament, which is the time before Jesus. And about 1,000 years before Jesus, there was a king who lived named David. He was over one of the superpowers of the day: the nation of Israel. And today, we meet him on the palace roof on a summer day, in the afternoon, at the height of his power." And then you move into the rest of your message. You've given them background while assuming their intelligence.

**Another way to think about this is, deliver what people need to hear in a way that they want to hear it.** People need to hear about truth. They need to hear about grace. They need to hear about Jesus. But you want to deliver all of that in a way that they want. So design your series around a felt need or pain point.

Let's say you're walking through a series on suffering. Many people wonder whether God understands their suffering and they want to know if He's listening or sees what's happening. Point them to Jesus and His time on Earth to show them that God gets suffering. You're delivering a truth they need to hear in a way they want to hear it. This will be helpful not just for first-time guests, but also for everyone else.

## **SEVEN: Give Clear Next Steps.**

Once the message is done and the service is over, what happens next? You want your first-time guests to have clear next steps. If you have a desk or kiosk in the lobby, make it obvious that it's for first-time visitors. Send them there to connect with someone or take their next step. Whatever you want them to do, make sure it's extremely clear. Because I promise you if it's not clear, your guests won't know what to do. And if they don't know what to do, they won't do it.

## **EIGHT: Follow Up And Welcome Back.**

Finally, make sure you follow up and welcome back. Hopefully you've captured their email address online or in person. Maybe you even got their address or phone number. Go out of your way to let them know that you're grateful they showed up. Send an email, write a note, or shoot a quick text. Thank them, celebrate them, and welcome them back again. Make the path for them to return in-person again clear. This extra follow up will wrap up their first-time guest experience in a positive way.

**Remember, you want to give people a great experience at your church because that will introduce them to a much greater experience with Christ.** And as leaders, this is our ultimate goal.

# Session 9: Notes

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

# **CONGRATULATIONS!**

You've completed of The Art of Reaching course.

One final nudge before you go. As my good friend Jeff Henderson likes to say, the value from this material is a lot like the value of a can of paint - it's all in the application.

Having this knowledge won't do much good if you don't apply what you've learned. So if you haven't already, apply it!

We love hearing from course alumni, so never hesitate to reach out [carey@careynieuwhof.com](mailto:carey@careynieuwhof.com).