

CHRISTIAN HEADS, HEARTS, AND HANDS

ARTICLES TO FORM US AS FOLLOWERS OF “THE WAY”

How to Get Unbelievers to Come to Church

by Dean Inserra

I feel bad for pastors who believe that if their church simply changed its worship style, unbelievers would start showing up on Sunday mornings.

For many, this has been and continues to be a strategy to get non-Christians to church. While I'm all for unbelievers coming to church to hear the gospel—just the thought of it excites me—I've never understood the logic behind most efforts to attract them.

When this vision is cast, I fear churches are setting themselves up for disappointment. Personally, I don't know many unbelievers who are likely to attend a church service. There are a few exceptions, of course—after a tragedy like 9/11 and Mother's Day, for example.

When they visit, unbelievers aren't usually motivated by the reasons churches think they are.

Facing the Truth

Why would an unbeliever come to church because there is free coffee? He can drive through the Starbucks line, pay \$3, and be home within 15 minutes.

What about great branding and social media? I've got some difficult news for you: Unbelievers in your community probably aren't following your church on social media.

The pastor is really funny? So is YouTube.

Perhaps unintentionally, these efforts and creative ideas are designed to attract people who hop around from church to church, looking for the flavor of the month. Our efforts, resources, and outreach are often well suited to reach the disgruntled or bored Christian next door, which isn't the mission of the church. Our mission is to reach the lost.

So if our churches are going to faithfully reach the lost, we must remind ourselves of the basic truth that church people go to churches, and unbelievers generally don't.

Our 'Double Promise'

But how do we do it? At the church I pastor, we have a strategy that's built around primarily reaching and equipping our own members. Why? Because if people love their church, they'll want their non-Christian friends to join them.

People usually come to church because of a relationship and an invitation. So rather than trying to attract unbelievers with elements and efforts they'll either ignore or never know about, we try to attract unbelievers by cultivating a church culture among our members that is in some ways attractive even to the unbeliever.

Our strategy to reach our own people consists of two elements that are never spoken of or advertised, but rather practiced and valued. We call it the “double promise.”

Promise 1: No disclaimer on the drive to church

I don't want our church members to have to give a string of "Oh by the way" disclaimers on their way to church with a friend. Maybe you've heard, or given, some of these:

- "Oh by the way, the pastor is very political, but he means well."
- "Oh by the way, I know you're introverted, but they ask new people to stand up and be recognized."
- "Oh by the way, there's this lady who sings, and she is awful, but her husband is the guy in charge of the music."

By valuing excellence and being intentional in how we do church, we eliminate the need to give disclaimers, and we also uphold the second part of the double promise.

Promise 2: No apologies on the drive home

In the same way, we never want church members to feel the need to apologize because of something unnecessarily offensive.

- "I'm so sorry, he's never made a joke about gay people."
- "I'm so sorry, the children's ministry security has never been this lax."
- "I'm so sorry, our pastor has never shown so little compassion on that issue."

When you bring someone to church, it's a big deal. The invitation wasn't random. The person's agreement to come wasn't random. Most likely, there have been months of conversations and investment to earn your friend's trust and invite him or her. So when he or she comes, you're entrusting your congregation with that person.

The double promise isn't showy or attractional; it's a culture that assures church members we aren't going to ruin all the missional effort they've put into their relationships.

Why They Come

The church I help lead is made up of people who are passionate about getting unbelievers to attend our Sunday gatherings. We don't believe it's the end goal, but we absolutely and unapologetically push our members to bring their friends to church—and we value it when they come.

If we stopped making this a priority, our members would wonder if we'd lost our way. In the Lord's kindness, we've seen tremendous fruit from our people bringing unbelievers to church and allowing them to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ. This double promise is essential for us, because if unbelievers are going to join us on a Sunday morning, it isn't because they heard that our band is awesome or that I am relatable. It's because their friend loves their church and couldn't wait for the opportunity to invite them.