

# Loving Lost People Into the Church

by [Marty Baker](#)

God, why isn't my church growing?

That was my rant one morning as I paced back and forth in our sanctuary...partly praying and partly complaining. I was in the fourth year of my pastorate, and our congregation was stuck.

I was growing frustrated, and I cried out, "Why? What's wrong with me? What's wrong with my church?" I really did not expect God to answer me, but He did. He prompted me with this thought: *Marty, I have called you to reach lost people, but you have not done it.*

Those words pierced my heart, and I responded, "God, I don't know how."

I had grown up in a mill village where I was taught to come out from among the world and be separate. I was very comfortable with that lifestyle. Now, however, God was calling me to go back into the world and make a difference. I was willing, but I simply did not know what to do.

Shortly thereafter, God placed me in a group of ministers who taught me how to engage with the culture in an authentic and compelling manner. I came to realize that many unchurched Americans are insulated from Christianity. I discovered that my unchurched friends do not listen to Christian radio or watch Christian television, nor are their lives touched by billboard and bumper-sticker evangelism. However, they are open to friendship with a genuine person.

If we are going to lead people to Jesus, it begins with developing relationships with individuals God brings our way. He will use these relationships to open the door of faith.

## Invest and Invite

Exactly where do we start? I tell our congregation, "Be nice to people." I know that sounds elementary, but sometimes we overlook the simple things. Yet, it's more than just being nice. I tell the church, "Focus on becoming friends with people outside the faith. There are people all around us headed for a Christ-less eternity, and many of them are waiting for someone to show them the way. God has placed us here to share the good news."

There are easy ways to do this. First, look at where you shop. You buy groceries, purchase gas, and shop at department stores. Embrace these mundane errands as ways to make new friends.

Second, consider your recreational activities. If you play golf, add an unchurched person to your foursome. If you are a walker, invite an unsaved person to walk with you. What about youth sports? I coached basketball and baseball in our county recreation department for 10 years. I met new families every season. There are people in our church today as a result of those connections.

Third, look at the relationships you already have established and start praying for your friends. I believe God will open the door for you to share your story. Such a conversation often begins

with your new friend asking questions about your faith. Be ready to offer a simple answer and then let the conversation flow. Next, invite them to church.

You can describe this process in two words: invest and invite. Invest your time in developing friendships and then invite those friends to church. Studies show the number-one reason people visit a church is because someone made the effort to invite them.

At Stevens Creek Church of God, we encourage our people to invite their friends to church. Several times each year, we provide cards that have service times and our location on them. This helps members to invite people to come to church with them. We tell our congregation, “If you will do what we cannot do by inviting your friends, then we will do what you may not feel comfortable doing—presenting the gospel in an easy-to-understand and compelling way.” We understand we are partners in evangelism.

### **Welcome and Engage**

Each week we plan our worship services with unchurched people in mind. We try to create a friendly environment so individuals who have never been to our church will feel welcome. This begins in the parking lot. Each week we have a team of smiling people directing traffic and helping our new guests find their way. Once they enter the building, a first-impressions team member greets them, helps them check their kids into the children’s ministry, and points them to the auditorium. We pray that this process will communicate to our guests that they matter to God and they also matter to our church.

Visiting a new church can be intimidating. We want to ease people’s fears and prepare them to receive God’s Word. When people walk into the sanctuary, give them a worship guide. This bulletin provides information about the church, general announcements, and a connect card. In addition, the worship guide gives the guest something to read during the minutes leading up to the start of the service.

The service begins on time and typically starts with music. We place the words of the songs on large screens so everyone can sing along. If someone is truly unchurched, the music portion of the service can be awkward. Unchurched people typically do not sing aloud, nor do they sing with a group of strangers during a normal week. They often describe this portion of the service as a “concert.”

People typically enjoy concerts, and we find that the music presented in our services helps position people to receive the message. If the music is too long or too loud, it can become a barrier for guests. So, we think about them as we plan our music.

As the pastor, I consider guests when presenting my message. The average person in America does not know the Bible. They do not know the difference between the tabernacle and the church; they don’t know apostles from epistles. If I am going to engage them with the Scriptures, I need to lead them through the process.

I typically display the major points of the sermon and the Scripture verses on a large screen when I speak. It is important for the message to be clear and easily understood. Clarity is more important than cuteness.

If you don't have a video projector, put sermon notes in the bulletin or provide a Bible for people who do not have one. When people come to learn, present the message in a way they can understand. You are a modern missionary carrying God's Word to an unreached community. Learn to speak their language.

People relate to stories. Jesus used parables to communicate with people of His day. We must do the same. Consider using personal testimonies, video clips, and dramas to capture their attention and share the gospel.

At every service, provide an opportunity for people to receive Christ. Whether it is Mother's Day or Reformation Sunday does not matter. Take five minutes at the end of the service and ask people if they would like to be saved. Then lead them in a prayer of salvation.

At the conclusion of the service, always offer a next step for new believers. We tell our congregation that faith is a personal decision, but there comes a time when that personal decision goes public, and that is called baptism. We offer a class for new believers and encourage them to be baptized and join the church.

### **Perpetuate the Mission**

It's been over 20 years since the day God prompted me to focus on reaching lost people. Since then, we have seen over 2,000 people saved, baptized, and join the church.

Our mission is not complete. We still believe people matter to God and therefore they matter to us. Each week we boldly proclaim that Stevens Creek Church is a place where the lost can be found and the broken can be healed.

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