

# MAGNETIC SUNDAY MEETINGS

How to win people for Jesus every Sunday

By Terran Williams

This book is part of the Missional Potency series.

These resources are all available on [www.commonresources.co.za](http://www.commonresources.co.za) - a website created for church leaders by Common Ground Church. Located in Cape Town, South Africa, Common Ground has grown from a motley crew of 50 people in the late 90's to a much bigger motley crew, now spread over 10 congregations and 15 services each Sunday across the city of Cape Town.

This particular book does not necessarily reflect the view of all leaders in Common Ground. It has been written by Terran Williams, who has served as a pastor, congregational leader, teaching team leader, and missional potency champion during his 20 years in the church.

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## Introduction: Common Ground's journey to magnetic meetings.

Two decades ago, I joined a church with a passion to reach the lost. Rigby, the leader of the church, held a twin passion in his heart that he articulated with this maxim: 'God has a double heart beat. Baboom baboom. His heart beats for the church – baboom. Then it beats for the world – baboom.'

What a great starting theology for the church that we would grow into. Rigby stated our church's vision in a way that held discipleship (God's heart for the church) and evangelism (God's heart for the world) side by side.

What wasn't so clear was exactly how we would expect to see people saved. Being a charismatic church, our weekly prayer meetings would see us leaders praying rabidly for God 'to bring in the lost'. We waved flags, encouraged dancing and clapping, sang spontaneous prophetic songs and relished the thought of God 'interrupting' our meetings – through some special leading of the Spirit.

We were on fire for God, but a few years in, we wondered, 'We have seen our church grow, but these people arriving are all already Christians. Where are the lost people we're hoping to reach?' We began to wonder why the people in our church were not doing the one thing they were meant to, the thing we kept on asking the to do – 'invite your friends.'

Desperate to see more unchurched people coming in, we experimented with Guest meetings. Twice a year, we'd choose two Sunday meetings over and above Christmas meetings, where we would work hard on creating a meeting that would be particularly attractive to unchurched people.

Our people would bring their friends to those, but the problem with that approach was two-fold. On one hand, the meetings we put on didn't feel like *us*. We were stiff and awkward in the way we led worship and the way we preached. Worship leaders and meeting leaders were trying on armour that just didn't fit them. I think our unchurched guests picked up on this awkwardness because they would generally not come again. On the other hand, those guests who did like what they experienced would come back the following week only to feel like they were coming to a totally different church!

At a leadership level, we were not united on whether non-Christians should be in our Sunday meetings at all. The church movement we were part of had warned us against the watering down of Christianity that was happening in the so-called Seeker Services of megachurches in America. As much as we wanted to reach people we would not dare be unfaithful to God by avoiding difficult topics and texts nor failing to enjoy God in our times of corporate worship.

This all changed when we came across an article written by a man called Tim Keller called 'Evangelistic Worship'. In it, he argued that the presence of non-

Christians in worship services was something the Bible encouraged, and that we as the church, without negating our attempts to edify believers and exalt God, should organize our meetings in an attempt to entice and evangelize not-yet-believers. As a preacher in our church, I was especially taken by his charge that we should seek to preach to ‘a mixed audience’ and that, in fact, it was possible and beneficial for *both* believers and unbelievers that we did just that.

He shared that the people in our churches, though benefiting from our meetings, could intuitively sense whether this would be a helpful or unhelpful experience for their non-Christian connections. No matter how much we told them to invite their friends, they would not if they felt it would actually have the reverse effect on the people precious to them, possibly putting them off Christianity somehow.

With Rigby’s full endorsement, I called together all the preachers in our church and trained them in what we called ‘Double Impact preaching’. I explained, based on Tim Keller’s suggestion, that if we preach in a way that engages both believers and not-yets, believers would eventually find themselves wishing that they had invited their friend to this one. If, for weeks and weeks in a row they had that same sense, then eventually they would bring their friends, especially if we promised that every Sunday meeting would be a good one to bring their friends to.

So started our attempt at being Double Impact in our preaching. Changing our preaching style was difficult, and we would fail to do it well many times, but the more we gave thought to it, the better we got at it.

We preached as if non-Christians were there, and they started to arrive, many of them making professions of faith after several weeks or months of coming. Our church began to grow significantly – and for the first time in its history – not just with Christians relocating.

Of course, every one of these precious salvations are by God’s grace alone, we just made more room for it to be understood and received. In the past, we had committed to try and reach people far from God in three meetings per year, now we were trying to reach them in 54 meetings a year. No wonder we were being 18 times more effective at doing so!

Once we were committed to Double Impact preaching, we quickly realized that the message was only one part of the meeting. We asked ourselves, ‘What does double impact hospitality, meeting leading, singing, announcements, offerings and exercise of spiritual gifts look like?’

Through trial and error we developed many of the insights I will share in this short book. In the research and reflection of writing it, I have also begun to sense that our blade has become a little blunt at times, and that we need to work on the sharpness of our attractational evangelistic efforts – so much of what is in these pages is beyond the current practice of Common Ground.

This means that I write this not only for church leaders outside of Common Ground, but also for those of us inside of it.

Enough said, let me share with you most of what we've learned about magnetic meetings.

# PART 1:

## MAGNETIC MEETING PRINCIPLES

### 1. DON'T DIVORCE MAGNETIC MEETINGS FROM MISSION OR DISCIPLESHIP

This book should ideally be read in tandem with another book in the missionally potent series called 'False Trilogy: Rediscovering the Sacred Synergy of Discipleship, Mission and Magnetism.'

In that book, I offer these definitions:

- *Discipleship* refers to our efforts to deepen our people in their walk with Christ.
- *Mission* implies the daily priority every follower of Jesus, as the church scattered, has to spiritually engage people outside of the spiritual community.
- *Magnetism* concerns making our weekly meetings great places to bring our unchurched friends to.

I wrote that book as a precursor to this one, because it seeks to show, beyond doubt, that all three of these are biblically emphasized, and all three stand or fall together.

Of course, there are complexities we need to navigate in order to hold all 3 of these in healthy tension, but if we instead opt to pit these critical priorities against each other, we inadvertently cut off our proverbial nose to spite our face. It's not a good look on any church. More importantly, it's not what Christ gave his life to see raised up as his bride.

In summary I argue for the triple priority of:

- 1) Catalytic discipleship – being a church that seeks to strengthen and equip believers for full-throttle followership of Jesus.
- 2) Centrifugal mission – being a church that equips our people to reach out to friends and family members who are far from God in lifestyles of daily mission.
- 3) Centripetal magnetism – being a church that seeks to draw not-yet-believers into our meetings for the sake of evangelism.

Far from diluting one another, there is a fantastic synergy and symbiosis in a church that seeks to hold up all three values. In other words we will never be as magnetic as we should be if we are not equally devoted to discipleship depth and missional living as a church.

Jared Wilson, in his book *Prodigal Church*,<sup>1</sup> does a study on churches that are magnetic but lack discipleship depth as well as sacrificial missional living. He calls them 'attractional-type churches'.

Although I doubt any so-called attractional-type church is guilty of all the things he tends to find across the board, his biblical diagnoses is worth hearing. Here is how he summarizes his findings of what's so wrong in churches that emphasize magnetism far above mission and discipleship:

#### **Unfortunate hallmarks of the attractional church:**

- Sermons driven by what Christian Smith calls 'moralistic therapeutic deism.'
- Functional ideology of pragmatism. Not "what's biblical?" but "what works?"
- Truncating of the gospel or relegation of the gospel as an afterthought.
- Equating size with success, contrary to many biblical examples otherwise.
- Treating membership solely/mainly as a means of assimilating volunteers.
- Wide open back door for those needing to be discipled beyond conversion.
- Reduction of the Bible to a source for good quotes.
- Claiming relevance/innovation while insulating from critical challenges to assumptions.

#### **Hallmarks of gospel-centered churches:**

- Trust not just in authority of Scripture but *sufficiency* of Scripture.
- Sermons that emphasize "It is finished!" over "Get to work!". Jesus is the star, not a bit player.
- Meaningful membership encompassing whole-life discipleship, pastoral care, and church discipline.
- Emphasis on members as missionaries & emphasizing "go and tell" over "come and see".
- A total trust in the gospel to be the power of transformation that no amount of inspiration can be.
- Regular commitment to the Lord's Supper.
- Reliance on *robustness* of the gospel to apply to the believer's justification & sanctification.
- Church as community of saints, not merely a worship service or resource center for programmes.

Instead of shaking our head and patting ourselves on the back because we can tick the box of never equating size with success, let's be gracious and humble enough to recognise that no single church is guilty of all the 'unfortunate hallmarks' just as no single church is getting all of the 'gospel-centred hallmarks' right all of the time.

For the rest of this book I am going to assume that you agree that:

- we should seek to draw in not-yet-believers into our weekly meetings.

- we do this in unison and symbiosis with our efforts to deepen disciples and send out believers in daily, relational mission.

## **2. SEEK EVANGELISTIC GRACE, FAITH AND INTENTIONALITY**

*Seeking evangelistic grace.*

By far the most evangelistically potent church in my city is Hillsong. Everywhere they have planted, they have enjoyed a remarkable ability to win lost people to Jesus in their worship services.

I have wondered what makes them so effective. The untrained eye of a church leader peeping in will say that it is the quality of their production.

I've had the privilege of having a few coffees over the years with one of their most established leaders, Rob Ferguson, who heads up the teaching internationally.

He shared with me how many American churches in particular have come to learn from them, and have imitated their worship services, but very often without the same evangelistic effect. Rob explained to me, 'When people ask us what our secret sauce is, we say it's 'God's grace on our house' – the sense of an open heaven over the meetings so that people always respond to the gospel.'

As I heard him say that, it dawned on me that God gives special enabling graces and gifts of the Spirit not only to individual believers, but also to different churches. One church might excel in one gift and another in a different one.

I have heard Brian Houston tell how he started Hillsong in a school hall. People did not respond to the gospel immediately, if I recall. But a few months in, he was preaching one Sunday and he noticed a rope hanging from the ceiling at the edge of the school stage. True to his personality, he held on to that rope, and swung out over the crowd and back again, laughed and then continued preaching. In the days that followed the only teenager in the crowd got talking to his friends, 'Come to my church. The pastor swings over your head while he preaches.' The next week all the teen's friends came, and all of them responded to the gospel, and a domino of conversions began to fall that has not stopped falling decades later. He reflects that there is an unusual grace upon the house that makes it easy for preachers to call in the lost.

As I heard these stories, I found myself modifying Paul's advice in 1 Corinthians 14: 'Follow the way of love and eagerly pursue the gifts of the Spirit, especially... evangelism.'

The only way I know how to grow in any spiritual gifts is 1) to be inspired by those who have it, 2) to ask God to give you that same gift, 3) to begin to exercise that gift trusting God to grow it little by little through faith-filled, faithful use, and 4) to ask those who seem to have this grace to pray for you.

That is my first advice to any church leader. Ask God for an evangelistic grace upon your church. Eagerly seek it.

### *Seeking evangelistic faith.*

In my meetings with Rob over the years, he has told me how all preachers in Hillsong know a story about Charles Spurgeon very well. In this story, one of the many church leaders Spurgeon had trained up and sent out to plant a church and preach in it asks Spurgeon, 'How come every time you call people to respond to the gospel, people respond, but when I do the same, they seldom do?'

Spurgeon answered with a question, 'Tell me, when you throw out the net do you expect people to be saved?' The preacher shook his head. 'Well, that's your problem – I always expect people to get saved, and Jesus said, 'According to your faith so it will be done to you'. He keeps his promise to me as he does to you.'

I am cautious in passing on this bit of advice, for fear that we see faith as a means of manipulating God. But, even though that risk is a reality, the opposite risk is just as true: God tends to work according to the faith of his workers, especially if their faith is informed by a revelation of his character and will.

Is it God's will that people be saved? If you believe in the doctrine of election (as I do), then you know that 'all those who are appointed to eternal life (will) believe' (Acts 13:48). I have always had faith in people getting saved when I preach precisely because I believe in the powerful call of the Holy Spirit upon the heart of the elect.

But even if you are not sure about what Acts 13:48 means, we have these fall-back Scriptures:

- 'The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance' (2 Peter 3:9). Just think, one reason Jesus has not come back, is that he is waiting for this next Sunday when you will call people to trust in Jesus.
- 'We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God... As God's co-workers we urge you... now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation' (2 Cor 5:20; 6:2). When is the right time for a

person to get saved? According to this Scripture, the day they hear the gospel. Every time people far from God hear the gospel is the day God wants them to be saved.

In my own experience of exercising faith for people to respond to my gospel proclamations, I have observed the momentum of faith. The more you have seen God work powerfully through your preaching in the past, the more faith you have that he will do it again.

### *Seeking evangelistic intentionality.*

I subscribe to the email updates of a pastor called Bob Franquiz who is a massive proponent for what I call ‘evangelistic intentionality’ – the do-or-die effort to do everything in his power to see more people come to Christ in his meetings. Here’s how he tells his story...

“My wife and I left a large church where I served as an assistant pastor to plant a church in Miami. After 18 months of ministry and weekly services, I got a report that shook me. Specifically, the number zero shook me. Zero was the number of people who had made a commitment to follow Christ during those 18 months. The day I got that report was one of those days where you slouch in your chair and pray the earth will swallow you whole. I knew if this report was correct, everything had to change. We weren’t reaching people, and a major overhaul was in order.

The church *should* be reaching people; it should be magnetic. The early church was. But we certainly weren’t. Let me fast-forward to the end of the story. In the first 18 months of our church, we didn’t lead anyone to Christ. In the last 18 months (written in 2013) more than 1,000 people have made first-time decisions, and more than 2500 have recommitted their lives to Christ. So what happened? The solution required us to make several adjustments to get on track. Here are seven specific adjustments that moved us from being un-magnetic as a church to magnetic:

- *Confront Reality.* Look honestly at where you are. Confronting reality means you establish a starting place to move from.
- *Learn new skills.* Often churches get stuck because the leader doesn’t feel the need to learn new skills. We must decide to stop doing what we’ve been doing and get serious about our growth.
- *Get a coach.* Coaching will help you get a new perspective on things, as well as help push you out of your normal routine.
- *Find a model.* Models are great, if we choose to learn from them rather than just copy them. (*Note: beware of using theorists as your model. Look for practitioners—those who are in the trenches leading churches and starting ministries.*)
- *Check the gauges.* Keep track of the vital statistics in your church, beyond just attendance and offerings.

- *Take radical action.* The solution isn't just identifying the problem; it is acting to correct it. If your church has been stalled for more than a year, a slight tweak probably will not solve anything. It will likely take an overhaul of an entire system of your church to get things on track.
- *Believe in a better future.* While you must confront reality, you must not let it discourage you from the future God has for you.

It took me a long time to realize it, but the crux of our problem was our culture. Culture defines what is acceptable, expected, and appropriate. Culture is powerful, and too few leaders give shaping culture the time it deserves. The reality is that culture overrides almost everything: rules, systems, and even common sense.

I don't actually believe that you can change a culture. A new culture has to emerge that overshadows and ultimately envelops the old culture. We shouldn't spend needless hours trying to change people who don't intend to change. The culture at Calvary became a culture of evangelism because we focused on new people coming to church while at the same time teaching our people what the Bible has to say about the Great Commission. Some embraced that, others didn't—but as new people arrived, they only experienced the new culture we were building.

We shape our culture more from the stage than anywhere else. We create a culture from the pulpit, by the stories we tell, the people we admire, and the values we uphold. Even more powerful are the repeated actions people see from the pulpit. Consistently preaching the gospel has done more to mobilize our congregation to invite their unchurched friends than any program could do.

On a side note, as you are working to develop a new culture, don't denigrate the past. When we do so we dishonor those who decided to attend our church based on past ministry. Change should be presented as the natural next step in our progression, which communicates that change is good, even while valuing the past. People weren't wrong in choosing your church based on what was there before; they are now simply moving forward, like going from sixth to seventh grade.”<sup>2</sup>

Such great insights - thanks Bob for the inspiration.

Now, please don't read what I am *not* writing. I am not saying that you should imitate either Hillsong or Calvary. I am not saying that you should expect wild evangelistic fruit – though there's no harm in asking God for it. I am not saying that you should dilute your discipling efforts of Christians, or avoid certain preaching topics, or embrace a 'production-orientated' approach to worship services, or any of that. What I am saying is that if you want to see more people coming to and being saved in your Sunday meetings, then at the very least you should:

- *Ask God for a special evangelistic grace upon your church.*
- *Trust God to powerfully work through your efforts and preaching.*

- *Make a do-or-die commitment to actually attract and reach people far from God in your weekly meetings.*

### **3. HELP VOLUNTEERS CONNECT THEIR SERVICE TO THE MISSION**

Before I speak about volunteerism, I want to make an aside on whether we need volunteers at all in our Sunday meetings.

I must admit there is something attractive about a house church. It's all relationship and little service. Someone just needs to open up their home, maybe another person organizes snacks and the rest is all building relationships.

The moment you are a church with 50 or more people, you hope to have:

- a prepared venue
- a worship band
- separate spaces for younger age groups
- a way of hosting newcomers – from street to their seat

In other words, you need to start signing people up to volunteer.

I can see the appeal of small house churches, but I can also see the appeal of meeting with lots of other people – the heights you can reach in band-led singing, the depths of insight into the Word as a skilled preacher expounds on the Good Book, the possibility of age-specific discipleship, the sense of visibility and impact a larger faith community can have in a host community, and last but not least, the ability to attract and reach non-Christians.

My own exposure to the house church movement has been a little disappointing. I have noticed that these micro-churches share the tendency to treat their church as their private discipleship club in just the way so often happens in larger churches.

Additionally, in my context at least, most of the non-Christians I know are more reachable in a setting where they are allowed a little more anonymity, and they can hear the Word preached not just discussed. The fact that so few non-Christians seem to come to Christ in our numerous home-based Life Groups, as opposed to our Sunday meetings, is testament to this.

I am not dissing house churches. I just have more faith to see more people regularly come to Christ in larger gatherings. If you lead a house church, please, please prove me wrong! I yearn for your evangelistic fruitfulness every bit as much as I yearn for that of the church I am in.

The point I make however is that I opt for a way of doing Sunday meetings that does require volunteerism. There are other advantages to a volunteer-rich model.

People who volunteer tend to:

- more readily build relationships (with others they serve with and those they serve),
- more steeply grow their relationship with God (servant-heartedness is an aspect of Christlikeness; and it's doing not just hearing that pleases God),
- more deeply own the church (the more time and energy you invest, the more invested you become).
- more joyfully serve God (many of the serving opportunities offer chances to utilize the specific gifts God has given you, the use of which brings great joy and meaning).

As you can tell, I like volunteer-rich Sunday meetings. A lot.

Having said that, volunteers can either make or break the evangelistic potency of Sunday meetings. They are the ones who set the atmosphere of the church. If they are territorial, sloppy, half-hearted, unfriendly, are not excited by newcomers, or are not servant-hearted it will all work against our efforts to host and reach unchurched people. Before they even hear the gospel, we have undermined their receptiveness to our message.

Conversely, if volunteers are excellent in what they do, whole-hearted, friendly, carry the vision of the church and are excited by newcomers it will have a powerful effect on a new person's experience of our church. Before guests even hear the gospel, they would have seen it in action coming through the warm, servant-hearted volunteers they have encountered.

One of the best ways we've found to motivate volunteers is to train them, and keep motivating with, with the understanding that their particular role is a small but crucial part in the winning of people to Christ.

Perhaps you can draw ideas or inspiration from three sample 'speeches' to inspire the whole-hearted service of volunteers. The first two are speeches I have used, the third is an adaptation of Wayne Cordeiro's take on the matter.

***Speech one:***

"We're saved because others served, and we serve because we're saved. Let's break those two ideas down. The first idea is that we're saved because others served. People are more likely to believe the message of God's love and Jesus' sacrifice if they have seen God's love and Jesus' sacrifice in action through his people. If we reflect on how many of us became convinced that God is real, we may remember that we saw the reality of God in the warmth and ways of God's people. Every time we welcome a guest warmly, or go to extra lengths to host the child they have nervously dropped off, or do stuff for them not for money but for love we are making an impression that will make it

easier for them to believe the gospel that drives us. The more people we serve, the more people we will see saved.

The second idea is that saved people serve. To be saved is to have a revelation of the love and sacrifice of Jesus Christ, where he lays down his life for our good. Not because we deserve it – we don't. Not because we asked for it – we didn't. Not because we acknowledge it – we seldom do. But simply because love and service is who Jesus is. When he comes into your life, your life becomes a riverbed of his love and service to others. In the past selfishness may have come naturally to you, but now servant-heartedness comes supernaturally to you.

The wonderful think is that, like pedals in a bike, these two things follow each other in an endless cycle. Others served us, and this made us more receptive to the gospel which saved us. Now that we're saved, we're ready to serve others, which in turn makes them more receptive to the gospel which can save them. And once they're saved, they will be more ready to serve others.

My plea to you is to let the salvation-service bicycle roll forward. May it pick up speed in and through you. May we be a church that glorifies God through our service, and a church where more and more people are saved and so also glorify God.”

### ***Speech two:***

“The preacher cannot and must not take the credit for leading people to Christ! In John 4 Jesus speaks about sowers and reapers. A sower is someone whose words and actions lead people towards Jesus. They don't come to Jesus, but they do come towards him. They're a little closer than they were before because of the positive and spiritual impact of the sower. The reaper is the person who finally leads the person to Jesus. They help them across the line of faith. Jesus said that both the sower and the reaper will share in the joy and the reward, because they both played a part.

In this church, many times the preacher will do the work of reaping, helping people to cross the line of faith. But please, do not for a second overestimate their role. Very often, the reason people are ready to cross the line of faith is that so many other servants have helped them take one step and then another and then another towards that line.

I have a story of somebody in our church who powerfully got this. I preached at one of our congregations, and when I went to pick up my kids from the Kids Ministry, I observed one of the volunteers, a twenty-something dude who had forged a fantastic connection with my kids. They didn't want to leave him. Additionally, he was making a special effort to talk warmly with parents who were picking up kids, and when all was done, he was cheerfully carrying equipment back to the storeroom.

Wanting to encourage him, I said, 'Bud, thank you for all you do!' He shot back with a smile on his face, 'I didn't do it for you.' I answered, 'Of course not, I know you did it for Jesus.' His answer perplexed me, 'Nope, I didn't do it for him either.' Curious, I asked him who he did it for then. His answer made such an impact on me...

'Just before you picked up your kids, did you notice that family in front of you in the queue? Well, this was their first time. I wanted to know, I heard some people responded to Christ when you preached in the meeting. Well, were either of the parents amongst those who put up their hands?'

'Yes,' I answered excitedly, 'The dad put up his hand.'

'Then I did it for him. And I did it for that whole family. I want them to come back next week. And I want all of them to be in heaven one day.'

It was such an example to me as the preacher that I must never take too much credit as a reaper. Here was a young man who understood the importance of his sowing role as he joyfully stacked the kids chairs and packed away the toys."

### ***Speech three:***

(This is one which I have adapted from Wayne Cordeiro in his book, 'Irresistible Church'<sup>3</sup>.)

"Everything each of us do is connected to the Great Commission of somehow, somewhere, saving the lost and helping people grow in the faith. This church is not simply a self-commissioned community with our own music, fashions, diets, and movies. We are asked to be a counterculture, and in order to be salt we must actually be that. Jesus shows us that eternal consequences give earnestness and purposefulness to our work. God invites us to love, serve, and obey him, and part of the adventure of following him means that we get to have a hand in helping people find their way to the Lord.

Do you deliberately look at every function of our church through the grid of its mission? For instance, the picnics, camps, and open mealtimes planned at church are never simply ends in themselves. They are always a means to something far more eternal. Or when a greeter shakes hands with people as they walk in the front door they are doing much more than saying hello. She's helping set a friendly and relaxed tone and atmosphere that prompts people to be more receptive to the gospel. Or when we as a church organize a sports team to play in the community we are doing more than hitting, passing or kicking a ball. It's all connecting people to Christians to help win souls to Christ.

Our youth ministry is more than simply a place for a church's young people to hang out and have fun together. It's a place of intentionally connecting young lives to Jesus. The volunteer who makes coffee each Sunday morning is doing much more than preparing a beverage. He's warming a heart in preparation for hearing the gospel. It's all related.

No *one* person leads another to Christ. It may be that one person eventually prays with another, directly shares the gospel message with another, or gives a salvation message to which others respond in faith. But we often don't see the long line of Christians with whom a non-Christian has contact before a decision is eventually reached. All steps along the way are important. Each of us, and everything we do, is part of our efforts to reach lives with the gift of God's love and the gift of a magnificent eternity."

#### **4. SEE THE SUNDAY MEETING THROUGH OUTSIDE EYES**

Good fishermen know that the best way to catch fish is to think like a fish. Instead of ignoring or criticizing the feeding habits of fish, they attune to them, and adjust their fishing strategy accordingly.

The parallel missiological principle is outlined by Paul who, 'became all things to all people in order to win some' (1 Cor 9:22-23). It's called contextualization.

Of course, we should never adjust *what* we have to say (the Scriptures and the gospel), but we should be more than willing to adjust *how* we say it if that will mean 'not making it hard for the nations who are turning to God' (Acts 15:19).

Once you carry a heart for people far from God, it affects how you see everything about your church. You start to look at things through their eyes so that you are more able to draw and win them to Christ.

If you invited a guest to your home, and you hope to start a friendship with them as you did so, you would probably host them a little differently to how you would host your brother who lives around the corner and has come over hundreds of times. You would clean things up. You would make sure everyone in your home is on form and friendly. You would welcome them warmly, maybe even directing them to special parking. You'd turn off the TV and give them special attention. You'd prepare delicious food. You wouldn't get upset with them when they sit at your spot around the table. All of these efforts are not you pretending to be something you are not. They are you seeking to be

warm, welcoming and courteous. Using that analogy, shouldn't we make a special effort for the most special people who come on a Sunday – our guests? We should communicate that we had hoped they would come, are glad that they have come, and hope that they come again. It should be clear as day that we want them there, and we want them to feel comfortable and welcomed enough to come back again.

It is so important that we get this right. One of the best ways to feel the importance of good hospitality is to visit a club of sorts, or even another church as an outsider. As you go, you're a little nervous. You are wondering what kind of people these are. Are they an exclusive club? Are they an inclusive family-like group of people? Do they want me to be here? Do they care how I feel as a new person? Do I feel safe here? Are my kids safe here? Do I want to come back to this? Well, these are exactly the questions new people are asking themselves. When we have been in a church for a long time, and even more so if we lead the church, we so easily forget what new people feel like when they come. In which case our failure to walk in their shoes leads us to fail hosting them adequately.

Another way to see the Sunday meeting through the eyes of new, unchurched people is to ask them how they experienced it. Over the years I have done this. I've said to the person who came for the first time, 'I am so glad you came. Do you mind if I ask you a question that will help us host people like you who don't normally come to church? How did you experience the whole meeting – from when you drove into the parking area all the way through until when you climbed back in your car? Were there parts that you liked? More important to me, were there parts that were confusing, intimidating or off-putting? Please, don't filter your answer – I'd love to know.'

I have never done this, but it is a real possibility that I have heard others recommend: actually pay someone who doesn't go to church, to come along and give you the feedback afterwards. (Do I need to highlight the evangelistic potential this has?)

As I have said, our Sunday meetings are not only for unchurched people. They are, more basically, for Christians who need the edification, equipping and empowering that God's Word and Spirit give. As church leaders, we are used to getting feedback, but 9 times out of 10, it is from the perspective of a Christian who is thinking about what *they* want, what *they* prefer. This is important, but if we only listen to that feedback, we will inevitably shape church to be more and more pleasing to insiders, yet more and more inaccessible to outsiders.

We *must* intentionally pursue feedback from outsiders. We must weigh it as heavily as we do the insider feedback. In fact, depending on your level of commitment to being a magnetic church, you might want to weigh outside feedback far more heavily.

I know of a few pastors who have enjoyed immense evangelistic fruit in their churches say, to other pastors who seek to learn from them, things like:

- 'Each of us must decide whether we want a church that keeps the Christians we have or reaches the non-Christians we do not have.'
- 'I often say to my church. You are welcome to give us feedback. But I must admit that the feedback we especially look for is feedback from people who don't normally come to church. Can I ask you to look at our church through their eyes, and think of ways that we can do better? We'd love to know.'

## 5. MOBILIZE A CULTURE OF WARM HOSPITALITY

Thom Rainer lists as another of the top ten things that drive away first-time guests, the experience of unfriendly church members, as well as the perception of non-genuine friendliness – the sense that some of the church members were faking their welcome and warmth.

When I was younger and visited other churches or groups of people, I was particularly sensitive to whether people warmly welcomed me. I did not expect over the top warmth, but it would have been nice if at least some people made the effort to make me feel welcome and showed some interest in me.

Though some unchurched people might hope for complete anonymity, I believe most would hope for basic hospitality.

Having greeters at the door, welcoming guests in the meeting from the stage, and inviting them to a guest section after the meeting are all aspects of basic hospitality. That said, none of these are sufficient *if the people in the church itself either ignore them or merely acknowledge their presence in a cold and aloof way.*

We need to train the people who call this church their home to see themselves as the primary welcome team. How to do this:

- 1) Leaders set the tone of hospitality by working the room before and after, and sometimes even during the meeting, warmly welcoming everyone they walk past. I have friends who attend Saddleback Church, consisting of 10s of thousands of people, and they tell me in a three-year period they were personally hugged and welcomed by Rick Warren 4 times. Just do the Math on how many people Rick Warren must have warmly welcomed before and after meetings.
- 2) Preachers should mention from time to time in their messages how they warmly welcomed someone and what a treat it was to meet this person.

Almost all culture can be forged through the behaviours the preacher enthusiastically and regularly talks about.

- 3) The preachers should train their people to imagine this place is their home, and every new person is their guest. Just last Sunday I mentioned in a sermon how someone had invited a guest, and how wonderful that was, especially that they gave their lives to Jesus subsequently. I then said, 'By the way, if this is your church home, I hope you realize that you are a family member and that this space is our lounge. Every guest that comes through those doors is your responsibility to warmly welcome. No need to go over the top, but at least say hi. Ask them their name. If you're not sure whether they're new, ask them how long they've been coming. Once the conversation gets going, think of who else you can introduce them to that they might connect with. I know this takes a little courage because we tend to be weary of strangers, especially in public spaces where it's odd to walk up to someone and say hi. But this is no ordinary space. This is our lounge. And these people are not strangers. They are our guests. And it is not the role of the guest to make the effort, but the role of the host.'
- 4) Especially with our core community and leaders, I suggest we should institute *a family hospitality rule*: the moment a meeting ends, for the first five minutes, your job is to only look for people you have not yet met, and say hi and ask them how long they have been coming, and take it from there. We are all dying to say hi to people we know, but they will be there in 5 minutes. Especially be on the look out for people who might present themselves in the meeting as first time guests – make a beeline for them. Again, the staff and leaders must model this to others, and speak often of this habit.
- 5) We need to speak about not only being friendly, but also being ready to make friends. I hesitate to include this point, because it is one of the most difficult things to expect of our people if they already feel relationally saturated. Many unchurched people will come along and be touched by the friendliness of people, but if they keep coming for several weeks and notice that no one goes beyond a courteous greeting or shallow 'how are you?', and no one invites them to a meal or coffee or small group or something, they will begin to realize that this church is a friendly clique, where everyone, nice as they are, already has their friends. Our evangelistic capacity as a church is only as strong as our relational capacity as a collective of individuals. If there is no more space in our groups or lifestyles or calendars to get to know more people, then there is no more space for new people to really belong in our church. Most times churches fail to see this about themselves precisely because we are so friendly, and we forget the difference between being friendly and becoming a friend.
- 6) On this point, this is one of the reasons that I have my doubts about indirect marketing methods in most churches. When we somehow drive disconnected unchurched people to come to our meetings, unless we are

particularly good at being both friendly and we have capacity for new friends, I think we're bound to do a poor job of genuinely extending the warmth of Christ to them. It's safer, I think, when people in our church invite people they know. This way their experience of warmth is more likely, and also they already have connections in the church.

## **6. IN A FAMILY-RICH CONTEXT, PAY CLOSE ATTENTION TO THE KIDS & TEENAGERS**

*One reason to prioritize ministry to the young is that they are more likely to receive that ministry.* I have just come from a public primary school where our church is running a weeklong mission to a 1000 kids. Despite the fact that 85% of these kids do not come from churchgoing families, I am amazed how responsive these little people are to the message that God loves them.

Statistics back this up: it is much easier to reach kids and teenagers for Christ than it is adults. Most Christians in the world came to faith between the ages of 4-14.

Jesus himself said that unsophisticated humans ('little ones') tend to grab onto the goodness of God more enthusiastically than sophisticated ones ('wise and learned') Matt 11:25-26.

*Another reason to prioritize next-generational ministry is that if we win unchurched children, we are more likely to win their whole family.* Centuries ago, children were not to be seen or heard. A parent would not consider the needs of their child as they considered which church to go to, or whether they would go to church.

Times have changed. Most parents' greatest pride and joy is their children. They are now far more inclined to put the social, spiritual and material needs of their children before their own.

This means that if they go to a church, they would not only evaluate it on how they experienced it, but even more so on how their child experienced it. It also means that if children have a great experience and want to come back the next week, it is quite likely that the rest of the family will follow suit.

Conversely, I have seen how one unhappy child can cause us to lose 7 or 8 people (parents, siblings, grandparents and aunts, for example). Thankfully the opposite is true. One happy kid can grow your church by 7 or 8 people.

Parents dropping off their children at kids ministry will evaluate the ministry first by the volunteers or staff who receive the children on drop-off, but also whether the facilities seem safe and clean. In his research-based article, 'Top Ten Ways Churches Drive Away First-Time Guests,' Thom Rainer lists 'unsafe

and unclean children's area' as one of them. He says that in fact a failure to get this right tends to 'generate the greatest (negative) emotional reactions in parents'.

I planted a church in a family-rich area. The fact that Julie and I have five small kids ourselves became a drawcard itself to other families. It also meant that Julie and I were very eager to get kids ministry right, not just for the sake of our own kids but also for the sake of other families coming too.

What we quickly discovered is that a thriving kids or teenager ministry is not only a massive growth engine, but also an expensive one. After paying the salary of a pastor and an administrator, next in line was someone to lead kids ministry, and then when possible, someone to lead our teen ministry. That's far before we considered hiring a worship band leader or other full-time pastors for example.

As a leader, I gave high profile to kids and teens. We would get our Next Gen leaders to share with the gathered church their passion for kids, as well as their need for trustworthy volunteers. I would preach from time to time on God's passion for the next generation. We would make sure that the most encouraged volunteers in the church were the ones who worked with kids and teens. For those church leaders who get to construct their own venues, I suggest as a basic guideline that the same square meterage be given to children and teens as to the adults.

We have found that once the kids and teens ministry starts to solidify, you can start tapping into what marketers call 'pester power' but what we see as a fantastic missional opportunity. In our church we do this by mobilizing kids to invite their friends to come along to special meetings. We also tell the parents to work with their kids in organizing pick-ups of these friends, or better yet, inviting the parents of those kids to come along too.

## 7. DEVELOP YOUR WEBSITE, SIGNAGE AND INFORMATION ACCESSIBILITY

Thom Rainer in his article, 'Top Ten Ways Churches Drive Away First-Time Guests'<sup>4</sup> lists as three of them: a bad church website, no place to get information, and poor signage. My experience concurs with his.

### 1) Bad church websites

Most people who come to a church for the first time will first check out its website. Other than the existing relationships they may have with church members, their first impression of the church will be the website. There are many things that the website should be, but most obviously it should have the address and times of service, as well as a warm invitation, either by video or script.

Although we don't film any of our meetings, I have a friend who does and puts it up on his church's website. His church is enjoying phenomenal conversion growth, and he tells me that over half of these new unchurched people first watched an entire service online before coming along to a real live one!

### 2) *No place to get information*

Rainer's research points out that if the church does not have a clear and obvious place to get information, your church probably lowers the chances of a return visit by half. There should also be someone to greet and assist guests at that information center as well.

### 3) *Poor signage*

Regular attenders and church leaders know exactly where the various kids ministry venues and bathrooms are. When we fail to look at the meeting experience through the eyes of a guest we fail to sense the vulnerability they feel. Not knowing where to go, they face the unpleasant experience of having to ask a perfect stranger for directions, which is something most people do not like to do.

A few weeks ago, I stood at the back of a meeting half way through the singing. A visibly stressed mother I had never seen before came and spoke to me. I guess she had asked someone else who did not know the answer to her question, who had then directed her to me. 'Where do my kids go? I have a 10-year-old and an 8-year-old. And I'm new.' I stepped into help-mode, but what struck me was just how distressed she was.

As I thought about it, here was a woman who, probably in a place of personal desperation, had decided to go to church and had somehow persuaded her kids to come with her. No doubt she had encountered their resistance, and had assured them that all would be well. So when she arrived and couldn't figure out where to send her reluctant kids her entire experience of this church was not one of warm home-coming, but confusion and angst.

Good logistical clarity on websites, information sections and clear signage are such doable solutions. Given that most newcomers have decided in the first 15 minutes whether they will consider coming back again next week, we must do all we can to get them off to a distress-free start when they arrive.

## **8. OPTIMIZE YOUR LOCATION, VENUE, CLEANLINESS AND ATMOSPHERICS**

Common Ground Church currently meets in 9 different locations. One of our biggest faith-challenges has been simply hiring or securing suitable locations.

The congregations that have enjoyed the most growth are usually those that secured the most suitable venues. Those of us who lead congregations that are hard to find, hard to get too, too small in size, have inadequate parking, or have venues that are difficult to enter or exit because of traffic tend to attract less people than those who are blessed with such things.

I do not want to overstate this point, because most churches in the world do not have ideal spaces, but instead must work with what they have. Stewardship calls us to do the best we can with what we have, even while we pray for and plan towards something better in the future. I know of one church in New York City that is now in their 69<sup>th</sup> venue in 10 years and has enjoyed remarkable conversion growth along the way. In the final analysis, it's not the venue but the people that are the major drawcard. Yet, venue is still important.

On this point, I'd like to make a plea to all churches everywhere that own buildings. In so many cities of the world, there are shrinking churches that have buildings but very few people, and there are growing churches that have many people but no buildings. For the sake of Jesus' kingdom, can you do the right thing and include in your constitution the following un-amendable line? 'If we as a church find that our numbers shrink to (choose a number) and despite our efforts over (choose a number) years cannot pick up our attendance, then we will appoint a committee who will find a growing church which believes the gospel and is motivated by the Great Commission, which has people but no building, with the purpose of either giving our building to them or selling our building at a radically reduced rate.' Let's commit to being magnanimous and non-territorial, recognizing that we're not building our own empires but God's kingdom, and in his house, there's room for all of us.

As for the question of spending lots of money on property, if there were ways to planting evangelistically effective churches without spending money on venues, I'd be open to them. I know the house church movement has a lot to say at this point, but (as I said earlier) I have been disappointed with what seems like a low evangelistic yield by that strategy.

The question I ask myself is, 'Has God called me to try reach these people and, if so, what will it take to reach them?'

In saying this, please do not hear what I am not saying:

1) I am not giving a thumbs-up to the consumeristic variety of Christianity where people superimpose their customer-centred, me-centred vision onto the Christian faith. As people learn to follow Jesus, I seek through my example and preaching to drive the consumeristic approach to church and God out of them. But as a good missionary, I face the fact that the people I am trying to reach are consumeristic. If I am to win them, *I must meet them where they are*, and then through the gospel and discipleship take them to where they should be.

2) I am not saying that churches should spend all the money that comes in on themselves. At least one advantage of planting a church into a more affluent area is that we run the possibility of not only reaching wealthier people for whom Jesus died, we also can win resourced people to Christ who then can resource wider gospel work. In the Common Ground story, the congregations that give the most substantially to gospel advance in poorer areas and other nations are the congregations that have higher percentages of well-resourced people.

3) I am not saying that we should spend more and more money on bigger and bigger buildings. Years ago, when our church was a single congregation, we enjoyed (and endured) a serious building upgrade that cost us a lot of money. I remember speaking to some people who said that instead of spending that much money on the building, we should give that money to the poor. Yet when I saw how much these critics were willing to spend on their own home (for 4 people) it was difficult to receive their critique. In hindsight, I am so glad that we spent every cent we did – in the decade since then we have seen so much gospel fruit in that building! All the financial sacrifices of God's people in that building campaign has yielded an eternal harvest of souls. Yet, at the same time, I am so glad for the idea of multi-site. As that venue filled up, we opted to start more congregations instead of building a yet bigger venue.

Thom Rainer lists 'Dirty facilities'<sup>5</sup> as one of the 'top ten ways churches drive away first-time guests. Guests notice when a venue looks like it hasn't been cleaned, or when there are no dustbins anywhere, or when bathrooms feel dirty, or there are stains on their chair.

We must remember that everything about the venue says something about us, especially to the guest who is trying to figure out if they will come back. If they are evaluating the state of the venue, shouldn't we as leaders do so too?

Andy Stanley, who seeks to lead a church that many unchurched people love to attend, has a lot to say about the need for an appealing setting. He says that an uncomfortable, unappealing or distracting setting can derail our

ministry to guests before the meeting even begins. It's not so much that a good setting adds to our message, which stands on its own, it's more that a poor setting detracts from it.

Years ago, before we upgraded the venue of our original congregation, we called all the staff together. Rigby and Sue (the leaders) suggested that all the time we'd spent in our venue had made us blind to what guests see. So they asked us to imagine we were guests and walked us through the venue, from parking through to the entrance and throughout the facility. We were amazed by what we saw!

Peeling paint, piles of outdated brochures on the Involvement Desk, missing lightbulbs, cracks in the tiles, tired looking rooms and dirty walls. That exercise led us to do what we could to make things look clean, organized, safe and fresh. As Andy Stanley highlights, clean says, 'we're expecting you'. Organized says, 'we're serious about what we're doing'. Safe says, 'We're delighted you brought your kids.' Fresh says, 'We're not a yesteryear church, but a church for today's people.'

One more thing: atmospherics. As wonderful as cleanliness, order and interior design are, we must not overlook the power of well-placed people, carefully chosen music, good lighting and the smell of coffee to lift energy before the meeting starts and after it ends.

## **9. MOBILIZE A CULTURE OF INVITATION**

There may be some unchurched people who arrive at your church and know no one. But most will come because somebody invited them.

This means that we need to:

- Cultivate a kind of church culture that others would want to expose their non-Christian friends to.
- Work at the Sunday meeting so that it is something our people would want to invite them to.
- Mobilize our people to actually invite their friends and family along.

Years ago, I found something Brian Moss wrote on his Next Level Leadership blog really helpful. Let me quote him at length<sup>7</sup> ...

'Over the years I've had many frustrated pastors ask me, "How do you get your people to invite?" I've discovered that's the wrong question. The right question is, "Why aren't your people inviting?"

The truth is people will naturally talk about something that they're really excited about...

Pastor, if your people are not inviting their friends and family to church it says more about the church than it does about them. So what are the most common reasons people do not invite their friends?

1. They're afraid you might hurt their relationship with their friend. We could do this by embarrassing them, putting them on the spot, or flat out ignoring them. In other words, they're terrified that the experience would be a setback for the gospel and their friendship.

2. They're afraid their friend wouldn't get it. They fear there would need to be a long debriefing after the service to either explain or apologize for what just happened. This is usually a music, message or methods issue. The music isn't up to date or the quality is terrible. The message is boring or doesn't apply to their life, or there are elements in the service that are designed for insiders only. For example, the pastor says some code sentence and the whole congregation chants back a memorized reply. The visitor immediately feels disconnected.

3. There's no invitational hook. This happens when the service is so predictable that there's no real angst to invite their friend on any given weekend. In other words, when every service is as good (or bad) as any service to invite to, then they'll usually never invite to any service. The key is to do something NEW! What awakens a sleepy member of your church out of their invitational apathy? Something brand new or exciting. I'm not talking about singing verses 1, 3, and 4 instead of 1, 2, and 4. I'm talking about *anything* that makes your members say, "Oh wow, we're doing that?!" Once you ignite a buzz they will begin to spread the word. This could include bringing in a special speaker, starting a new ministry, adding a new service time, doing a sermon series that has obvious traction with the culture, changing the music style... Remember, the enemy of invitational is predictability. When people are excited about what's happening on the inside, they'll spread the word outside!

I agree with everything Brian says. One thing he misses however is that the reason that many of our people do not invite their unchurched friends or family is that they have none to invite, or if they do, they are not close enough to those people to make it feel right to invite them along. For example, as a general rule, if you have not invited people to a meal, I generally don't think you're ready to invite them to church. That's why we need to mobilize Christians to live their lives on mission – but that's another book.

Let me pick up Brian Moss' point of giving our people a hook to invite their friends with the next point...

## 10. CREATE SOME HIGH-ATTRACTION SUNDAYS AND SERIES

As I reflect on the evangelistic growth of the congregation I led for 7 years, one of the things I realize is this:

Over two thirds of all the unchurched people who arrived on a Sunday did so in less than one third of the Sunday meetings.

It was when we gave our people a 'hook', and encouraged our people to invite their friends to this or that Sunday, that most unchurched people arrived.

On an average year, in Common Ground these meetings consisted of:

- A six-week attractational series in February.
- Easter Sunday.
- A four-week attractational series in August.
- Christmas.
- Two to four baby dedication Sundays per year where we encourage new parents to 'invite as many people as possible, especially ones who don't normally come to church'.

There were some years, when there were other meetings that attracted a lot more unchurched people:

- A marriage vow renewal
- A family Sunday where we would speak about family.
- A guest speaker who was a celebrity or author.
- An interview of a person who had survived a remarkable challenge.

In all these cases, we had told our people in the weeks preceding these meetings that, 'Although every Sunday is a good Sunday to invite your friends to Common Ground, this would be a *particularly* good one to do so.'

What we noticed is that, on those Sunday or series we would have an attendance boost, and along with an excitement boost for our church who were delighted to see the new people coming along. After that Sunday or series, our numbers would drop again but usually a few of the guests who had come stuck around!

The numerous statistics I have read of how few of our people will invite someone to church in any given year, means I must optimize this precious commodity of an inviting member.

I suggest that there are special Sundays where we should create a little bit of anticipation and excitement in our people.

There are two mistakes I have seen church leaders make with regard to these 'bigger Sundays'. The first is that church leaders fail to enthuse people about them in advance. The second is that church leaders try to create hype about each and every Sunday and every series, so that when they try to enthuse people about these bigger Sundays, people have become immune to their

enthusiasm. Not every Sunday can be the greatest Sunday in the history of your church.

I propose that church leaders should plan these bigger Sundays and series in advance. We do so by asking ourselves:

- 1) What two or three series of 4-5 weeks long can we do that will especially appeal to unchurched people, and which our people will find it easy to invite their friends to? When in the year should we do them?
- 2) What public-calendar-related self-standing Sundays could also serve as high-attraction Sundays? Easter? Christmas? Mother's Day?
- 3) What other special days can we create? A guest speaker that our culture will connect to? Baby dedications? A marriage vow renewal day. How can we create some buzz around these days? For example, we could clean the cars of single moms on Mother's Day, or have professional photographers take portrait pics of married couples on the vow renewal day.

Once you have committed to these days in the year ahead, let me share some experience-forged tips to help you maximize these Sundays:

- 1) Although there might be some special features to that day, keep the meeting as close as possible to how they normally happen, so that the returning guest feels right at home the following week.
- 2) Give yourself at least six weeks to plan these days well. This planning will increase the quality and impact of the day, as well as reduce stress on the staff.
- 3) Treat these bigger Sundays as momentum boosters for your entire church. In the same way a flywheel generates momentum not through a sustained push, but by a series of small pushes, so these special Sundays tend to generate an attendance momentum for the whole year. Focus the leadership and staff on the critical importance of these bigger Sundays. If only one or two leaders are abuzz about the evangelistic and growth potential in these special Sundays, you will surely not tap into their true potential.
- 4) As church leaders, six weeks before, nail down the title, chief content of the Sunday or series. The more lead-time the better.
- 5) Five weeks before, three other teams can be activated:
  - a. a design and creative team can begin to create the visuals – which will be used in all announcements; invites, posters etc., as well as start to conceptualize a video advert if possible.
  - b. a team of people can brainstorm any special touches they can add to the Sunday or series that will create greater impact and higher appeal. They can also consider where we might need to better prepare volunteers, improve the guest experience, create next steps and follow-up newcomers who will respond.
  - c. Kids and Teenager ministries can decide if they want to dial into this Sunday, and if so, how. As one example of creative ideas, in our church we have tried creating series-inspired collectibles that we

give to kids, as well as bonus collectibles if they bring a new friend, both for them and their friend.

- 6) Four weeks before, and every week that follows, the leaders can stress to the congregation that this fantastic opportunity is coming for them to invite their friends to, and ask them to start thinking if there is someone they can invite.
- 7) Three weeks ahead, give your people well designed invite cards. Either hand it to them as they walk in, or leave them on the chairs. When announcing the coming Sunday to them, say, 'That invitation card we have given you is not for you. It's for you to give to someone else who doesn't normally go to church.' Through social media and email, we can also send out digital invitations that people can use to invite their friends with.
- 8) Two weeks ahead, upgrade your ask of people to think who they could invite. Here are some ideas:
  - a. Would you mind if we take 30 seconds of silence as you prayerfully think about who you might be able to invite.' Music can be played, or the band can play during this time, so that there is no awkwardness in the silence.
  - b. Would you mind texting this number now (number on the screen) with people you would like to invite, so the prayer team can pray over those names?
  - c. Would you mind writing down the names of three people you would like to invite, and then pray for them everyday this coming week?
- 9) In the week or two before, the lead-preacher (not just the announcements person) should make a good mention of their excitement for the coming Sunday, and what they are trusting God to do in people's lives. They should ideally connect the Sunday to the overall mission that God has given us as church. They should also highlight that, although we hope to impact friends far from God, that this series is also for Christians and will help us to grow in our walk with God. If possible, they should mention who they have invited and how they did so – inspiring others by their example.

As you think about what more 'attractional' Sunday series you can do, ask yourselves:

'What are the sins, idols, struggles, challenges, points of interest that are most prevalent in our culture? What topics, the moment we mention them, engage interest in most unchurched people in our part of the world?'

What topics would make it very easy for our people to invite their friends? Imagine them saying, 'Hey, I'd like to invite you to church next Sunday. They are starting a sermon series on \_\_\_\_\_ and I thought you'd be interested.'

For a decade now in Common Ground, we have created two such series a year. Perhaps to generate your own ideas, or if you want to adapt our content, you can find some of them at [www.commonresources.co.za](http://www.commonresources.co.za) - click on 'Sermon Series's.

# PART 2:

## MAGNETIC MEETING COMPONENTS

So far I have spoken about many things related to using Sundays to reach people far from God, but not the actual meeting components itself. In this section I speak of the things that can be done in *each and every Sunday gathering* that will make it more likely our people will invite their friends, and when those friends come, what will make them far more effectively engaged and evangelized.

### **1. CALL PEOPLE TO WORSHIP IN A WAY THAT INCLUDES UNSAVED PEOPLE**

In Common Ground, as in most churches I know of, either the worship leader or the meeting leader calls people to worship at the beginning or early into the meeting.

May I suggest that this is done in a way that is both inviting and inclusive of unchurched people. Usually these calls to worship mention some inspiring Scripture, or quote, or anecdote, followed by an appeal for us to all engage and enjoy God. All good!

Let me suggest two other things to keep in mind:

- 1) Do calls to worship that are God- and gospel-centred rather than me-centred. It's far more compelling to take the minute or two you have to speak about the goodness of God.
- 2) After issuing the summons to worship God, issue a line to the effect of, 'If you're new here, feel no pressure to participate – I pray that God will make himself real to you too.'

Here are two examples of calls to worship that are God-centred and inclusive of unconvinced people who are looking in:

#### *Example 1:*

Good morning everyone. Colossians 1:15-18 in the Message says, "We look at this Son and see the God who cannot be seen. We look at this Son and see God's original purpose in everything created. For everything, absolutely everything, above and below, visible and invisible, rank after rank after rank of angels—*everything* got started in him and finds its purpose in him. He was there before any of it came into existence and holds it all together right up to this moment. And when it comes to the church, he organizes and holds it together, like a head does a body." Today we gather as a church to honour and meet with the Son. What a privilege! If you're new here, be at ease and feel no pressure to participate – I pray that God will make known his Son and his purpose to you too."

*Example 2:*

One of the most exquisite invitations ever spoken is this one by Jesus: “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” (Matt 11:28-29). In the next hour Jesus invites us to come closer, to unburden in his presence, and to harness ourselves to him. If you’re new here, feel no pressure to participate, but I pray you too would sense his invitation to come learn from him and as you do, discover the unforced rhythms of his grace.”

## **2. SELECT SONGS THAT HAVE GREAT CONTENT AND CULTURAL RESONANCE**

### **Songs should have great content...**

Many hit worship songs nowadays seem to lack great gospel content. I don’t question ‘the anointing’ on this song, nor that untold amounts of Christians have encountered God through this song, me included. But my brief from heaven is clear – preach the gospel. So, I prefer songs that communicate aspects of God’s goodness and greatness well in terms of content.

Here’s our suggested format: we start our song set with two or three songs that affirm who God is and the gospel (what we call ‘doxological and dramatic’ songs). These songs circle around the greatness of God as Creator, King and Father, as well as the exalted person and saving work of Jesus. They are not songs about us.

The final two songs focus on our immediate experience of the Spirit (‘dynamic’ songs) and the offering up of our lives (‘devotional’ songs).

We always start with songs about God and the gospel before we get to songs about our spiritual experience and the offering of our lives. We never get that order wrong.

In our understanding, doxological and dramatic songs (that lift our gaze to God and affirm aspects of the gospel of Jesus and salvation) allow us to affirm truths that are independent of our feelings and commitments.

Only once we have affirmed these truths, are we ready to fully stir the affections and make our commitments via song. Affirmation is the ground for affections, not the other way around. Likewise, God’s commitment to us in the gospel is the basis for our commitment to him, not the other way around.

As we also remember the unchurched people in our midst, most times it may be better to start with affirming the gospel. This is because unchurched people first need to hear the gospel, and then – through the gospel – be introduced to the God who is back behind the gospel. Think of Paul’s order in

Romans: drama (1:1-11:32) precedes doxology (11:33-37). Besides, claims about history are a more compelling starting point than claims about metaphysics. Drama centres around actual things that have happened in history – Jesus' incarnation, death, resurrection, exaltation. Doctrine refers to more abstract truths about who God is. Having discovered the acts of God in drama, we are ready to look upon the attributes of God in doxology.

As a general rule we try to cover all four bases in a song set. There should be 1 or 2 songs that affirm the gospel in drama, 1 or 2 songs that lift up our gaze to God in doxology, a song that is more dynamic in its emphasis on the immediacy of God's Spirit, and a song that is more discipleship- or mission-orientated. In a 4 song set, the general rule is that we should sing 2 or 3 songs in the drama and doxology category and one or 2 songs in the dynamic and devotional category.

Many of the songs we sing tend to blend two, or sometimes even three, of these themes. That is fine, but then we should evaluate the overall weight of emphasis.

We remind our worship leaders to be aware of, and counter their bias. We all tend to gravitate to one or two of the 4 kinds of song: drama, doxology, dynamic and devotion. That is fine, but we must not hold God's people captive to our bias. We need to be driven by theology not preference on this one.

In summary, an ideal song set should cover all 4 emphases: we should affirm the gospel (Drama), we should lift our gaze to God (Doxology), Facilitate Encounter (Dynamic), Offer Ourselves (Devotion).

That said, drama and doxology tend to centre more around God and Jesus, and dynamic and discipleship tend to centre around ourselves. That's why we must put greater and primary emphasis on God and the Gospel, and far less on ourselves, not that it is wrong to consider our feelings and commitments in worship, just that they are secondary and a response to God and the Gospel. Besides, stressing the first two over the last two is essential to maintain our break from the me-centred worship that the church in the West seems to be drifting to, in favour of a definitive God-centred worship.

### **Songs should have cultural resonance...**

In the last 50 years there have been untold worship wars related to the preferred style of songs.

Throughout the history of the church, we are not free to change what we have to say in preaching or what we sing about in worship, but we have a missiological responsibility to consider our context in how we say it, and how we sing it. When it comes to music, there are music styles that no longer appeal to the majority of contemporary people who do not share this same emotional connection to songs of bygone eras of church-life.

As long as we select our song styles on what Christians like instead of what non-Christians like, we are guaranteeing our obsolescence and the eventual loss of our young people who feel their church is stuck in some weird time warp.

We must keep updating stylistically – this includes our choice of instruments for example. For years I have been part of a church that sings ‘contemporary’ songs for example, but if I am honest, when I listen to the Top 40, the style of music our church opts for is hardly contemporary. I know it’s an awkward thing to say, but if our definition of ‘contemporary’ unhinges from the Top 40, we’re drifting into cultural irrelevance.

Style includes how wordy songs can be. Songs nowadays tend to have less words and more repetition, so the verbal density of old hymns might not be suitable anymore.

Style includes what is catchy. Songs that were catchy to my parents no longer stick to me. My feeling is that many of the hit worship songs are good indicators of the kinds of songs that are catchy. As I mentioned earlier, catchy tunes without good content is such a waste! Much better to catch people with great content.

Style includes metaphors. Many of the metaphors of old hymns must have moved people of a previous century but they leave me cold. As song writers immerse themselves first in Scripture and then also in culture, we will keep on finding metaphors that have immediate traction.

My feeling is that we should look especially to twenty-something leaders to tell us what is contemporary in terms of style. As a 40-year-old I can’t tell the wood from the trees. Like so many who have gone before me, I can think I am swimming in the fast flowing stream of a culturally resonant style when in fact, I have eddied off to the side in a muddy pool of a dying style.

### **Songs should radiate joy and hope and, if possible, be upbeat...**

Not all missional churches have a high-production emphasis. Certainly some churches have enjoyed great evangelistic success by embracing big-stage concert-style worship. But this is hardly possible in small churches, and it is beyond the skill set and affordability of the average church trying to win the lost.

Having acknowledged this, I want to now issue a mistake smaller worship bands in smaller churches often make. They listen to the worship songs created by Bethel, Hillsong or Elevation for example, and are powerfully moved, leading them to think, ‘I want to introduce this song to our church’.

And here’s where it goes wrong. Many of the slower worship songs are written in minor keys, but precisely because they are produced by a full band with many layers of music built in, we don’t realize that, apart from all the voices and instruments, it’s actually a very heavy-feeling song. As the worship leader

leads the congregation in it, one can almost feel the energy draining out of the room. Far from reaching the heights of worship we experienced in our car when we first heard this song, the water level of emotional engagement and active participation by the singing congregation drops scarily low.

What is the solution? I propose that the first couple of songs should not only be doxological, but should also inject joy and energy into the meeting. This comes from selecting songs whose content leans heavily towards joy, and which are more upbeat as a result.

For two years in Common Ground, I noticed ever-dropping enthusiasm levels in our singing. It was only when we noticed that many of the first songs were heavy in feeling, or low-beat, or were in a minor-key that it dawned on us what could fix it. So we went to work and created a list of 25 songs that were doxological, joy-bent and more upbeat and asked our worship leaders to start their worship sets with one of these two songs.

As we have instituted this little tweak, it's amazing how much better our times of singing have become. Not only has this helped believers engage and enjoy God, but we have seen a higher rate of gospel responses by guests. We attribute this greater impact on unchurched guests to three things:

- 1) When the dominant mood of singing is joy, the singing Christians that the guest is observing tend to observably enjoy God more. People enjoying God is a much better advert for the Gospel than people who look like they're drinking lemon juice while they sing.
- 2) When the songs start with affirmations about God and the gospel, then the emotionally expressive singing of the people starts to make sense. Instead of being critical about what they think is the 'fakeness' of all these happy Christians, they realize the basis for the joy – God is good, and Jesus is Saviour. These God-centered songs lend a framework to the guest to help them make sense of the songs that are more intimacy-focused or devotional.
- 3) Especially those guests who are energy-in-the-room-sensitive, which I want to propose is most of them, will more positively respond than one who feels the energy drain in the room. Think of the average person trying to choose a restaurant. One is filled with the chatter of people, upbeat music and plenty of light, and the other is dark, quiet and empty – which one would you opt for? We simply cannot allow the highest activity we can engage in (the worship of God) to be associated with low energy. It doesn't only send the wrong message to those looking in on our faith, but I believe it is a disservice to our people who should be led toward a kind of worship that takes their gaze off of their problems and onto the all-sufficiency and hope they can only find in God. Finding joy in his presence (Psalm 16:11) and finding strength from this joy (Neh 8:10) can only do disciples and those looking in good.

Friends, it may seem like I'm overly-focused on the technicalities of our singing together and what onlookers think while we worship. Of course, when we worship – we do so for God alone. Regardless of our different styles, song

selection or the quality of the production, God is looking at our hearts, searching for those that worship in spirit and truth. I am also aware that God (from time to time) may lead us toward sober reflection and times of corporate repentance, which will usher in songs of lament rather than songs of joy.

In the main however, I believe that leaning toward songs that elicit praise in our people is good for them, better for onlookers, and the kind of worship God loves best. After all, our chief end is to glorify God by enjoying him forever.

### **3. AIM AT YOUR MUSIC NOT BEING A STUMBLING BLOCK**

I don't believe that excellent communication skills or excellent musical skills get people saved. It's the gospel alone that can save. I never want to attribute any of the saving power of the gospel to the skillfulness of any human being.

That said, I believe that lack of excellence in communication and music can detract people from the message we're trying to communicate in our preaching and singing.

Tim Keller, in his book 'Center Church' articulates this better than I can:

*Cultivate high-quality aesthetics. The power of art draws people to behold it. Good art bears its message into the soul through the imagination and begins to appeal to reason, for art makes ideas plausible. The quality of music and speech in worship will have a major impact on its evangelistic power. In many churches, the quality of the music is mediocre or poor, but it does not disturb the faithful. Their faith makes the words of the hymn or the song meaningful despite its artistically poor expression, and further, they usually have a personal relationship with the song leader and musicians. But any outsider who arrives not convinced of the truth and having no relationship to the music leaders will be bored or irritated by the poor offering. Excellent aesthetics includes outsiders, while mediocre or poor aesthetics exclude. The low level of artistic quality in many churches guarantees that only insiders will continue to come. To say this positively, the attraction of good art will play a major part in drawing non-Christians.'*<sup>9</sup>

When a church starts, we have to fill the posts with whoever is willing, regardless of their gifting. But as it grows, we can trust God to add people who are gifted to do the things they are best at. When we deploy those early volunteers we should thank them profusely, but also issue the disclaimer that we are happy for them to do this for the next year or two, and then we will evaluate whether they should continue. This makes it much easier down the line to say, 'Thank you from getting us to this level, but I think it's time for you

to hand this on to someone else who can take us to the next level.’ The alternative to this is that you can keep unskilled, ungifted people on the stage for as long as you want – but then face the fact that this will likely undermine the evangelistic potency of the meetings, as well as fail to draw gifted musicians and singers who tend to be drawn to other excellent musicians and singers.

#### **4. WHOEVER TAKES THE MIC SHOULD BRING ENERGY NOT DRAIN IT**

When a church starts out, you seldom have all the gifted people you would like. Someone must preach. Someone must lead the meeting. Someone must do the announcements. Someone must lead the singing. If they are gifted at bringing energy and influencing the mood of the room, fantastic. But very often they are not – and we must make do with who God has given us.

But as the church begins to grow we must put people who are gifted behind that mic.

One way of evaluating a church is along four categories of strengths. Ezekiel 1 reveals four “faces” of God – lion, eagle, ox, man. The lion speaks of governance, authority, influence. The eagle speaks of intellectuality. The ox speaks of service and task. The man speaks of relationship and accessibility. Interestingly, the four Gospels echo these themes: Matthew reveals Jesus as lion. Mark reveals Jesus as ox. Luke reveals him as man. John as eagle.

Of further interest is that *Strengthfinders*, a personality-based assessment tool built on massive research into the variety of human strengths, divides up 34 unique strengths into four categories: strengths of influence, strengths of relationship, strengths of execution, strengths of intellect. Here we see an overlap of lion, man, ox and eagle.

Individual humans tend to be marked by one or two of these categories of strength. However, when groups of people work together, the goal is that the overall group would reveal a blend of all four strength categories. As *Strengthfinders* puts it: “We need balanced teams precisely because individual humans are not.”

Which leads to a question: *as we evaluate our church, what are the dominant and less evident categories of strength?* We may, for example, be reflecting God’s face of eagle, but not of ox, or of lion but not of man.

This would make for a great conversation. For example, in *Common Ground* in 2018, many leaders spoke about this and concluded that ‘lion’ is perhaps – of recent and in most but not all congregations - our weakest category. With our roots as Friends First (the previous name of our church) we are strong in relationships. With our brilliant staff mobilizing volunteerism, we are strong in

getting the job done. With our heavy-reading preaching team, we are strong in intellectuality. Perhaps we are weakest in our capacity to bring energy, to exude influence, to intentionally craft rich atmospherics in our meetings.

Another bit of new language we have developed in Common Ground is to speak of a person's thermostatic ability. Most people who will take the mic will tend to reflect back to the room the emotional and spiritual temperature of those in the room. In this way they are thermometers. But some people, not that many, have the ability to be thermostats. They speak in a way that governs and increases the energy in the room. There is a resulting lift in enthusiasm and levels of engagement.

*We needed to analyze thermostatic ability.*

As we have analyzed it, we have come to notice 5 kinds of energy that these more thermostatic people have:

- Vocal energy: they speak in a way that gains and holds attention.
- Facial energy: they invest expression into their communication.
- Gesticulating energy: they communicate with their whole bodies.
- Spiritual energy / anointing: they seem to have a power of God upon their words.
- Convictional energy: they are deeply impassioned about what they are saying.

There are some people who are gifted to be strong in most or all of these ways – as a general rule these people should be given the mic. There are also some people that are gifted in none or few of these ways – these people should not be given the mic. The in between there are some who are not particularly gifted but are not weak either – these people can work on improving.

*Let's admit that some of us are simply not attuned to influence.*

Perhaps you read this and think, 'What's the big deal?' Might I suggest you're like the non-muso listening to a song next to a muso, who is complaining about the sound quality while you think it's fine. If we don't have influence gifts, we hardly can tell the difference between flat and high-energy meetings.

One idea is to visit a church that is particularly strong in doing high-energy meetings and are winning many people to Christ. Look around at the people – and notice that such a church draws people who often are attuned to energy.

A church that is strong in relationship, in execution, in intellectuality but weak in influence and energy will seldom attract high-energy, high-influence people – that's a full quarter of people.

*Not just speakers but musicians can increase energy in a meeting.*

Where does music fit? Sure, there are lyrics in music. As such it has an intellectual dimension. But music falls square in the influence category – in its ability to create energy, influence the emotions of people, generating a welcoming and moving atmosphere.

If a church's meetings are to grow in the lion category (influence), then at least one place to do that is to step up the musical aspect of our Sunday meetings. What does this mean for musicians? It means at least two things:

- 1) That musicians are intentionally thermostatic (setting the desired emotional tone of the meeting), not thermometers (reflecting back to the people where they are).
- 2) That musicians infuse and move people with music, not only with worship leading.

Of course, leading the congregation in the singing of songs, will be the primary function of the worship band, but if we are to be more mindful of our need to move and influence people, *then worship bands should also be willing to play music that moves people, even when the people are not singing.*

Let me offer some examples that may or may not be applicable to various churches:

*Play the very joyful songs we will soon sing before the meeting starts.*

Whether live, or via MP3, we can 'cue' our people for joyful singing, by playing songs in the 15 minutes before the meeting starts. This gears people up for joyful singing, and as we start to sing, there is an immediate familiarity with the song that they have been listening to in the background.

*Fill in low-energy moments in the meeting with music.* Don't stop the band while someone:

- does the call to worship,
- shares a prophetic word,
- lands the singing time with a prayer,
- lands the message, usually the preacher, in a time of prayer and throwing out the net for gospel-responses and sometimes ministry.
- does the benediction at the end of the meeting.

When the band completely stops during these moments, riding upon only one voice, there's often a tangible *loss of energy*. Much better for the musicians to keep playing even while these things happen. Instead of the band politely stopping while the person on the mic speaks, I suggest that the band *plays unless otherwise instructed*. As I have argued, this music does not detract from the intellectuality and authenticity of this moment, rather it underlines it.

*Bring back the worship leader who does not have an instrument.* After two decades of worship leaders always holding a guitar, we have found that a better idea is to sometimes drop the instrument all together (not literally). We have found that many worship band leaders who are trying to play an instrument as well as lead in singing struggled to inject energy into the church. This is because the attention taken up by complexity of playing the instrument drains them of some of their ability to sing with energy, to as well as engage God and the people with their body and face, heart and soul. As one example, one guitarist-band leader has found that leading with a tambourine is more effective. Another has ditched instruments all together.

## **5. WHEN YOU WELCOME PEOPLE, INCLUDE THE GUESTS**

An important part in Common Ground meetings is the moment we tell people to greet the people around them.

There is some pushback on this from some research that says unchurched guests prefer total anonymity. Thom Rainer, for example, in his research of first-time guests, discovers that they really don't like this part. In fact, of the ten most common gripes guests have with a church, Rainer says this one came up tops.

When I weigh up the positives of doing this (a chance for everyone, members and guests alike, to be welcomed personally, an injection of 360 degree relational energy into what would otherwise be a stage-audience experience, the ancient liturgical practice of pass the peace) against the negative (some unchurched people not liking it) I still opt to have it.

I think the key is to do this part well in three ways:

*First, explain the reason.* Telling people why we do something is the best way to motivate them to do it. Why do we want people to say hi to each other? Tell them, by saying something like, 'We're a church where people really matter so...' or 'We're a church interested not just in God but each other so...' or 'We're a church that is a family with space for more so...'

*Second, choose the right timing.* Getting sitting people to stand up and say Hi is doubly awkward because sitting people resist standing. Getting sitting people to say hi to the people around them is awkward because you have to do some real seat gymnastics to twist your body this way and that. I think the best time to do it is *the moment before standing people are about to sit.* At the end of the singing is therefore the best time. I like to say the words, 'Just before you sit down would you...'

*Third, think over the instruction.* Don't tell people to hug – something strangers don't like to do to other strangers. Don't tell people to say hi to friends – guests are acutely aware they don't have friends and feel excluded by the instruction. What I like to say is, 'turn around and say hi to one or two other people!'

*Over and above this chance to welcome each other, the meeting leader issues a direct welcome to everyone, especially the guests.*

In Common Ground, there are two moments in a meeting when the meeting leader welcomes all.

The first is very briefly at the beginning when they say something like, *'Welcome everyone. Great to be here with you all.'*

Maybe they also say something like, *'My name is Don. I am one of the many pastors here.'* They may also comment on something on everyone's mind. If a major city or sporting event just happened that the vast majority is acutely aware of, draw attention to it.

After welcoming all, we encourage our meeting host to also say these words, *'Any guests, I am especially delighted you're here. Please make yourselves at home.'*

Notice we call them guests, not visitors. We are, after all, a spiritual home, not an exhibition.

The second time we welcome people is straight after the singing and before the announcements and offering. At this point we welcome our guests once again, but now we do more than just say hi, we take the gap to host them more thoroughly. There are three reasons we do this second greeting:

1) We can say the welcoming words once again, *'To our guests, we're delighted you're here with us.'*

A second greeting gives a much needed second assurance that they are in the right place. Imagine you're invited to someone's house for lunch, and you don't know anyone there. Imagine that as you walk in the door you're welcomed then, but then no one makes any effort to acknowledge your presence after that? How would you feel?

2) *We use this second greeting to also get something into their hands.*

Most of the Common Ground congregations still opt to get a brochure into their hands, one that will not only tell them more about the church, but also afford them a chance to give us their details. The worst mistake one can make here is to say, 'If you're new here, please put up your hand.' This is a devastating failure to walk in their shoes. Being new can be a terrifying experience, and now you are telling them to put their hand in the air, and they

are not even sure why. It's critical that if you get them to identify themselves, that you *first* motivate them to do so with good reasons.

Here's my preferred wording: *We'd also like to put in your hands a brochure that tells you who we are, and helps us best serve you. If you'd like one, we have a team who can give one to you – please raise your hands... Ah, welcome and welcome. Great to have you with us.'*

There are other methods of getting this brochure to people. If there is a little pouch on the back of the chair in front of them, you can keep it in there, and ask them to fill it in. Another alternative is to get a digital version of the brochure to their phone as they sit there. Perhaps asking them to take out their device and type in a web-address / message a number etc (whatever technological solution works best) so that they can view it on their phone. Ideally this also permits them to fill in their details should they like to be contacted further.

3) *Finally, we use this second greeting to also invite them to connect with us after the meeting.*

I prefer these words, *'We'd also love to say hi face-to-face and treat you to some specialty coffee and a biscuit straight after this meeting right over there...'*

Note: never say scary words like, *'We'd like to see how we can get you involved'* or, *'We'd like to find out more about you'*. Both of those come on way too strong.

As for the offer of specialty coffee and biscuit, the better the offering, the more likely they will come. Depending on how badly you want to meet these new people, what would could you lure them with? People love free stuff.

## **6. LET GUESTS OFF THE HOOK WITH REGARD TO GIVING**

When I have invited guests to church, and we take up the offering, they either tend to ice up (their folded arms are a give away of their suspicion towards any institution that takes money from people 'in the name of Jesus') or they panic and grab their wallet and look for money to give, thinking that somehow this is their chance to prove they are a good person after all, or thinking that this is the expected payment option for the service they have attended.

I know of at least one group of churches (Elevation Church in Australia) that are growing through conversion growth, who have noticed such discomfort from the guests that they have taken the offering out of the liturgy. Instead there is a giving station at the back of the venue, which they sometimes direct

people to. Obviously they still teach their people to give, but there is no pressure moment in the meeting.

However, most churches that are growing rapidly through conversion growth don't take their foot off this pedal at all, precisely because they are so passionate about doing ministry. The more money that comes in, the more Gospel impact we can make. I take this latter approach – whatever discomfort or criticism we might receive from unbelievers when we take up the offering is, in the bigger picture, worth it because that money is underwriting so much more ministry to yet more unbelievers.

In Common Ground, we have found the solution is, just before we go hard after our people's generosity, by pointing them to the goodness of God and the bigness of the mission, to say the golden words,

*'We're going to take up the offering now. If you're a guest, feel no pressure – this is a moment for members.'*

## **7. THINK CAREFULLY THROUGH THE ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Nobody likes announcements that carry on too long or are poorly done, but based on my experience of having unchurched guests in meetings, we lose even more traction with them when we don't do announcements well.

Christians tend to acclimatize to this part of the meeting done badly, but they stick out like a sore thumb to newcomers who are not as forgiving.

I have found advice given by 'Rich Birch' in his 'Church Growth Flywheel' to be helpful on this point. Let me quote him in full:

'The announcements part of Sunday morning is capable of moving people out of their seats and into the streets of the church. It moves them from having an internal relationship to making a heartfelt, whole-life connection to the Church. The announcements shouldn't be a secondary, small part of the service. In fact, they are just as important as the music or the teaching. There is nothing holier than people taking action on their faith. There are five pieces of announcement advice that I give to the churches regularly:

*1. Narrow the focus.* You're probably talking about too many things on a Sunday morning. Most churches would, outside of the teaching, have some sort of offering call. They'll also want to do some sort of new-here announcement, where we acknowledge the guests. They also might have a prayer portion of the service that talks about the people in the church that are in need. Then someone usually gets up and rattles off three or four, or heaven forbid, maybe six or even ten different items about what's going on in the life

of your church. Stop it. This is a bad idea. Time and again, studies have shown that the more options we give to the people, the less likely they are to pick any of them. So what should you do instead? Only mention one thing. (I know that sounds crazy.) Take the time to connect with hearts, and ensure that people understand why, whatever you are announcing, is so important to them.

*2. Engage.* This part of the service should always be about getting people to engage in the life of the church. This is not a time to give updates on what's happening. The punchline of the announcements should always be here is the next step you need to take in your church. Don't talk about the weather. Don't talk about the sports game from last night. Be on the task. Make eye contact, use humor, have a truly engaging conversation about the one calendar item you're discussing in your spoken announcements. We wouldn't want a worship leader to lead the musical portion of the morning, and not care if the people in the audience are engaging with the music. The same is true with the announcements portion: if people aren't moving to action, it only means that our leaders aren't doing their job. The output of every announcement needs to be to fill out a card, check out a box, text a page, some sort of call, text, a link. It has to be some sort of call to action that moves people to connect with the life of the church.

*3. Always state the why.* If, for example, we're talking about the upcoming youth group event, don't just say, "We've got a youth group event coming up." Explain why you're doing the youth group event. Let the parents know that you're hoping that the young people in the life of your church will gain new friends and that going to this event will help your students make the kinds of friends that the parents in your church would love to have.

Every announcement needs to be wrapped up in a healthy dose of why. Why is it important? If you can't clearly articulate and make an emotional connection to what's important about this for the audience, simply don't do the announcement.

We do small groups as a church so that you can foster deeper relationships. We host Bible studies so that you can understand the Word in a clearer and more concise manner. We have volunteer opportunities in our kids' ministry because you're going to love helping other kids connect with the teachings of Jesus. Start and end every announcement with what's in it for our audience.

*4. Slow down, and clarify action steps.* Take it from somebody who has spent hours watching the church people make announcements over the years. We've warmed people up, we've connected with them, we've engaged them, and we've told them what's in it for them. We've made a logical connection; they understand why they should plug-in with whatever the call to action that we're doing... then we roll over how it is that they're supposed to connect.

We aren't clear with them about the actual steps that we need them to take. This is a botched opportunity. We've invested all this time, effort, and energy

to help our people feel connected, and then we miss it in the execution when we are at the last mile. You can't make it too clear or too obvious what you need people to do.

If you're asking people to sign up in order to serve in the kids ministry, hand out a postcard to everyone in your church, and let it contain just a very simple form with a picture of kids on it that says I would like information on serving in kids ministry. Strive to reduce all the friction of sign-ups on your website and in your physical environments.

We tend to underestimate how we over-complicate things. So dumb it down, make it simple. Slow down. Churches mess this step up because they're usually just talking too quickly, trying to communicate too much information in too little time. Slow down, and communicate in a way that makes it obvious for the people what they have to do next.

5. *Be remarkable.* Whoever is doing the announcements needs to think about how he or she can do this in a way that will get the people's attention, and tell their friends about. How can we give the announcements in a way that will drive home the point in a creative and engaging manner? How can I be remarkable?

A simple way to do that is having clear and comparing visuals every time you get up and do an announcement. Props are an amazing way to drive home a clear message.

Bringing guests up on the stage to help you with the announcements is another great way to be remarkable. Do something different than they are anticipating.

If you're talking about an upcoming movie night in the church for elementary kids, why not walk in with a bag of popcorn? The unmistakable aroma of popcorn will grab their attention. Rather than just having a picture of popcorn, have actual popcorn on the stage. (Bonus points: you could actually pass some out to people in the first few rows or ask people to raise their hands if they're going to be coming to the event, and hand them bags of popcorn right in the middle of the service.)<sup>10</sup>

Though I agree with Rich Burch on announcements not being a moment for updates, I do think that there are one set of updates that must be shared – all that the church has been doing in the name of compassion. On this point, I agree with Tim Keller, who in his book *Center Church*, makes the case for this:

*'We live in a time when public esteem of the church is plummeting. For many outsiders and inquirers, the deeds of the church will be far more important than words in gaining plausibility. The leaders of most towns see "word-only" churches as costs to their community, not as value. Effective churches should be so involved in deeds of mercy and justice that outsiders will say, "We cannot do without churches like this. This*

*church is channeling so much value into our community through its services to people that if it went out of business, we'd have to raise everybody's taxes." Mercy deeds give the gospel words plausibility (Acts 4:32–33).*

*Therefore, evangelistic worship services should highlight offerings for deed ministry and should celebrate through reports and testimonies and prayer what is being done. It is best that offerings for mercy ministry be separate, attached to the Lord's Supper. This brings before the non-Christian the impact of the gospel on people's hearts (it makes us generous) and the impact of lives poured out for the world.'*

## **8. PREACH FOR DOUBLE THE IMPACT**

By far the most evangelistic important part of the meeting is the preaching of God's Word. As important as it is for the unbeliever to sense something of God's presence and transcendence in this meeting, or to see God's love evident in the volunteers, or to notice the sincere whole-heartedness of the people in the singing, God's sharp edge in the conversion of people is the anointed preaching by his messengers. 'How can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" (Rom 10:15)'

Paul's conversion strategy hinged on a primary conviction, that 'the gospel is the power of God to save people' (Rom 1:16). Despite the variety of plotlines in the 100s of salvation testimonies I have heard over the years, I have heard hardly any that did not involve, at some point, the saved person hearing someone try explain the gospel.

For example, I have two ways of describing my journey to faith: a long one and a short one. The long one involves the death of a father, the pursuit of Christian friends, my best attempts to escape the hound of heaven, and going on a surf camp organized by a church. The short form of my testimony is this: I was not saved, then I heard the gospel preached and God opened by eyes and I became a child of God.

My point is that the articulation of the gospel is a non-negotiable if we wish to see people saved in our meetings.

The Spirit's anointing on that message is just as important. When Paul, reflecting on what led to the conversion of people in the Thessalonian church, said, 'Our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction.' (1 Thes 1:5). What we learn from Paul is

that for people to get saved, they need more than our words. The Spirit must be at work, anointing both our words and opening up the eyes of unbelievers so that they are enabled to perceive 'the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God' (2 Cor 4:4).

### **Sunday preaching is not only evangelistic preaching**

Sunday preaching is not only for unbelievers. It's, perhaps first and foremost, to edify and equip believers. Those who feed God's people must not only preach the gospel but the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27). The preacher must not 'hesitate to preach anything that would be helpful' (Acts 20:20) to God's people. The breadth of the material that is to be preached means that preachers over the centuries have developed the skill of preaching all of God's Word to all of God's people.

This is fantastic! But it comes with a problem. If we have not tried to engage non-Christians simultaneously over all the years of our preaching, then we have unwittingly developed a kind of preaching that tends to resonate with Christians but not non-Christians.

This leads to the absence of unchurched people in our meetings. As I said earlier, our people often do not invite their friends because they intuitively believe that your preaching will either leave their guests cold or will have the opposite effect of what we hope for – it will push them further away from the gospel.

### **Double impact preaching**

The solution is to *always preach in a double impact way*. Earlier I defined 'double impact' as preaching that both edifies and equips believers as well as engaged and evangelizes not-yet-believers.

This is a whole skill set on its own. All Christian preachers know how to preach to a all Christian audience. Some Christian preachers know how to preach to a primarily non-Christian crowd – we call this 'evangelistic preaching'. But few know how to engage both groups *at the same time*.

### **Learning a new skill**

In my own experience, learning to preach in a double impact way each and every Sunday has been one of the more difficult skills to learn, but is by far the most important for a greater harvest.

To listen to some of the training lectures I have given on the subject, go to [www.commonground.co.za](http://www.commonground.co.za), and look for the two sessions on double impact preaching.

For now, let me share some of the most important skills of double impact preaching.

The basic advice I give to preachers in *Common Ground* is that they prepare the first draft of their message and then admit that they, like almost all preachers everywhere, have a default setting to preach Christian messages to Christian people. I then tell them to think of one or two non-Christian people they have socially connected with lately. I tell them to then imagine these outsiders sitting in the front row. I then say, 'Now overhaul your message so that not only do you edify and equip Christians, but that you compellingly engage and evangelize these specific unchurched friends.'

Here are some of the most important skills of double impact preaching:

- First acknowledge that, like most of us, you have a default setting to preach Christian messages to Christian people. So after you've prepared the first draft of your message, think of one or two non-Christian people you have socially connected with lately. Imagine these people sitting in the front row. Now overhaul your message so that not only do you edify and equip Christians, but that you compellingly engage and evangelize these specific people.
- Get to the point and keep your message under 35 minutes. People's concentration muscle is gone. The only times people in our culture listen to a monologue is to a Ted Talk presenter or a comedian, where hardly any real effort of concentration is required.
- Speak well. People would rather believe a lie told well than the truth told poorly. As important as good content is, you must learn to communicate it in a way that grabs and holds the attention of people.
- Directly address 'those who are new to church or back after a long time' early in your message, so that they know that this message is for them too.
- Engage culture, because this is the water that we are all swimming in. Where possible, quoting respected or popular cultural voices that echo biblical truths is a way of building a bridge towards people who do not recognize biblical authority.
- Descend the ladder of abstraction – don't only affirm doctrines, also show people the positive difference this makes to their daily lives. As a general rule unchurched people are less concerned about 'what's true' than 'what works', so show them the difference the gospel can make in their actual lives.
- Take out all church and theology jargon. If you opt to keep it in, immediately define these terms so that unchurched people don't feel excluded.
- More than merely making truth clear, make it real. Especially use stories and metaphors that help drive concepts from the head to the heart.
- Reveal some of your humanity and struggles in your message. Unchurched people are especially going to be more receptive if you challenge their (wrong) perception that you are 'holier than thou'. In a

culture where authenticity is king, don't let anyone think you're aloof or perfect.

- Perhaps include a whole point in your message directed to 'those of you who do not believe in Jesus or who are not sure what you believe' – this will necessitate taking out some stuff that you would have included if you were only speaking to Christians.
- Imagine some of the objections and concerns that non-Christians are likely to have about major things in your message. Instead of denouncing their concerns, articulate them better than they could, affirm them and then winsomely say something to dismantle them or at least suggest why they are not deal breakers to believing the gospel.
- Make sure that your message is not moralistic in tone – what a tragedy if the overall impression of your message is that Christians are those who merely try harder to be good people.
- Related to the previous point, make sure your message lands in a proclamation of the gospel of Jesus. Highlight some aspect of the gospel which the topic or text you are preaching on allows. Highlight something of who he is, what he has done and the difference this all makes. On this final tip, I quote Greg Stier of Dare2Share ministries:

*'After visiting a church in our community a few years ago, the pastor of the church (whom I have known for a while) texted me after the service and asked me to give him an honest evaluation of the church. My text response was this, "Great service! Friendly people. Good sermon. Great worship. The only thing I'd say is that if I was lost when I came in I'd still be lost when I left (because the gospel was not clearly given)." When you give the gospel consistently in your church meetings then the church members know that any time they bring an unreached person they will hear the gospel. When I was a pastor I gave the gospel at the end of every sermon and we saw people come to faith weekly. Why? People invited friends, family and neighbours to church because they knew that the gospel would be given clearly and consistently.'*<sup>7</sup>

If you would like to dig into the skill of double-impact preaching from other resources, you can read the 5 resources that have helped me the most on the subject:

- 1) Tim Keller's article. Search 'Evangelistic worship Keller' online for a free copy, or read chapter 23 in his seminal work, 'Center Church'.
- 2) Read 'Deep and Wide' by Andy Stanley on his chapter entitled, 'Double Barrel preaching'.
- 3) Download the free notes of Spurgeon's lecture in his Lectures to my Students entitled 'On conversion as our aim'. Search the lecture title online.
- 4) Download the free ebook by Vincent Antonucci titled, 'Sermons for the unconvinced'. Search for that resource online.
- 5) Read Tim Keller's book, 'Preaching' – in particular chapters 2-4. This book is available at Amazon.com.

## 9. THROW OUT THE NET SKILLFULLY

Whether attending unbelievers respond to the gospel on any given Sunday or whether they don't respond but decide to come back again – I call both a win.

Of course, we'd all prefer for every unbeliever to respond affirmatively the very first time they hear the gospel, but from experience, there are many people who are so far from believing the gospel, they are almost certainly not going to get saved the first time they come to church. They just have too many obstacles to overcome. They might say something like, 'I'm not sure I agree with everything that was said, but there was much that did speak to me and it seems like these people might have something of substance, so I think I'll come again.'

That said, preachers who do 'the work of an evangelist' (2 Tim 4:5) must do more than proclaim a message, they must call for a response. A survey of the evangelistic messages in the book of Acts almost always includes a call to respond – usually a call to repent and believe. A presentation about the grace of God in Jesus which does not carry an explicit, or at the least an implicit, invitation or urgency to 'come to Jesus here and now' is an incomplete presentation of the gospel. When I summon people to Christ I do not say, 'it's now or never' because (like I said in the paragraph before) for some it's not now. But I do say, 'If you want to know the ideal time to receive Christ it's when he is offered to you – today is the day of salvation' (1 Cor 6:2).

My favourite term for issuing this 'response time' is 'throwing out the net' because: 1) It connects perfectly to Jesus' preferred evangelistic metaphor (fishing).

2) It captures the experience of the person issuing the call – you never know what you're going to catch.

3) It expresses the faith required in the moment – the fisherman fully expects to catch something.

### ***When is a person saved?***

A careful study of the New Testament shows that a person is saved when they trust in Christ personally as their Lord and Saviour.

What most people don't realize is that this very often happens while the person is hearing the gospel. As they hear it they are granted the gift of faith and repentance. Read Acts 10 in which Cornelius and co are saved while the message is being preached. Also read Romans 10 which speaks of 'faith coming as one hears the Word being preached.'

In the book of Acts the initial outward indicator of the faith that has already been born in a heart is baptism. This is not the moment people get saved, rather it is the most common indicator that they have been saved. Having believed the gospel, they now express that faith (which exists prior) in baptism.

I say that so that we never overplay the method of response that we tend to advocate as preachers. The person who puts up their hand, or walks to the front, or fills their name onto a card, is not always someone who is about to be saved, but perhaps someone whose heart has already been renewed by the Spirit as they heard the gospel in the minutes before. I don't think these indication methods are harmful, but we must be careful to not make people think that somehow raising hands, repeating a scripted prayer or going to the front is what saved them<sup>12</sup>. Jesus is their Saviour. Spirit-inspired faith is the means by which they receive his salvation.

Yet at the same time, and I admit I go beyond Scripture like most evangelists before me, I think it is helpful to create a moment where people indicate their brand new faith – not only is it useful to us so we can connect with those people, but it is also useful to them because the very act of indicating their new faith serves to consolidate that faith.

### ***There are many methods of throwing out the net***

My methods of throwing out the net in a Sunday meeting that I have used, from those I like most (and therefore use most) to those I like least (and therefore use least) are:

- 'Let's pray.' 'Please close your eyes', 'please raise your hands', 'Follow me in this prayer', 'Come and grab a new-believers book'
- 'As communion begins pray a sample salvation prayer on the screen, come and join in the feast.'
- 'Let me pray on behalf of those who want to trust in Christ' 'If that was your prayer then please fill in on a card that you have trusted in Jesus today.'
- 'Let's pray.' 'Please close your eyes', 'please raise your hands', 'Follow me in this prayer', 'If you prayed that prayer, please come to the front right now.'
- 'As we sing this song, please come to the front right now'.

All of these have their place. Depending on the style of the church, the culture of the city you are in, the personality type of the preacher, or the kind of event this is, anyone of them could be best.

My plea would be that no one should feel tricked or pressured, and that no one is led to believe that whatever 'faith-indicator' you are specifying somehow is the means by which God is saving them. I also am nervous of faith-indicators that some people by personality, will find terrifying, like walking down to the front before the watching crowd. It seems to be an example of 'making it hard for people who are turning to God' (Acts 15:19). I am not saying it should never be done – if indeed there are lots of other people who respond like this, it is far less scary. It admittedly also doubles up as a chance to put God above the fear of people, as well as giving a chance for counsellors to get with these people.

***My preferred method is the first one I mentioned.***

I don't want you to use my method anymore than I hoped David would use Saul's armour, but I share my method in the hope that it can help you develop your own. In fact, as I analyze my own method, I recognize parts of it that I picked up from 4 or 5 other evangelistic preachers.

***'Let's pray...'***

'Let's pray. Thank you God for speaking to us about... (I recap the main idea of my message. First, I'd like to pray for those of you who are new to church or back after a long time. Maybe you came in here not believing in Jesus, or not sure what you believe about him, but as you have been here today, you have sensed what millions before you have sensed – God calling you into his salvation and family. You know this is you because God is tugging at your heart even now. If that's you I want to urge you to say yes to him. The Bible says today is the day of salvation.

***'Please close your eyes.'***

'Please close your eyes. If you want to trust in Jesus today, I am going to ask you to raise your hand soon. I do this even if there is only one of you who responds – your life is that important. I don't want to draw public attention to anyone, but I'd like to know who I am praying for. I am going to count to 3, then you raise your hand. Your hand going up is your way of saying, 'Terran, pray for me – today I am trusting in Jesus for my salvation'. Here we go: one. God loves you. Two. Have the courage to respond. Three. Raise your nice and I so I can see.'

I then look around and each hand I can see I affirm. 'Wonderful. Fantastic. Yay. Praise God.' I then give more people a chance. 'Is there anyone else?'

***'Follow my prayer.'***

'Wonderful, you can put your hands down. Can I guide you in a simple prayer. You can pray under your own breath. It's not a magic prayer. I am just helping you express your faith in Jesus. I will give it to you line at a time. Here goes ...

'God, thank you that you love me.  
Can you say that? God, thank you that you love me.  
Thank you for sending Jesus to the world.  
Thank you that he died on a cross for our sins.  
Please forgive my sins.  
Thank you that he rose again from that dead.  
Jesus you are alive – come and live in me.  
Take me into your family. Teach me to trust you.  
Take me into your kingdom. Teach me to follow you.  
Amen.'

***'Finally'***

‘Those of you who trusted in Jesus. Welcome to the family. I am so happy for you. Would you mind if we all praised God for his goodness to you? (Everyone clap) As this meeting ends, can I ask you ...’

At this point each church should have its own method of connecting with these responders so that we can help them take their next steps. Some possibilities include:

- ‘We have this book called Ignite. It’s a 31-day journey for new believers. Please grab a copy from the Involvement Desk.
- ‘If you’re comfortable, I’d be so honoured if you came to me right away to say hi. I want to congratulate you personally. And I want to give you this book called Ignite. It’s a 31 day journey for new believers.’

Though it is not always possible, if someone can connect with them personally and get their contact details, and then commit to take some next steps with them that would be ideal!

### ***Salvations, decisions or gospel responses?***

What do we call it when a person indicates that they want to commit or recommit to Christ? Some churches call this ‘salvations,’ but that is presumptuous. Ask anyone who has worked in a ministry that counsels people who have just indicated faith in Jesus, and they will tell you how many people are not sure why they put up their hand, it’s just that they had a strong desire to or they have a crushing sense of personal need in an area of their life, or that they’d really like to know more. In other words, in the heat of emotion, people do not always do what we ask them to.

Some churches opt to call this ‘decisions’ – as in, some people decided to come to Christ, or come back to Christ. Again, this is not always why people respond. Very often it is a sense of need that entices them to respond, in which case they should be called ‘desperations’. My other problem with ‘decision’ is that I don’t think it’s the best language for responding to the gospel of salvation in the first place. Saving is something God does, even our faith and repentance is a work of the Spirit. I’d rather opt for a softer term like ‘co-operations’.

As I am sure you can pick up, I don’t like either of those terms. I prefer instead to speak of ‘gospel responses’. These are people who, upon hearing the gospel, have made some kind of a response. Some of these responses are genuine salvations, but many are not, yet are meaningful nonetheless.

## 10. DO COMMUNION THOUGHTFULLY AND AFTER THE MESSAGE

Communion is a powerful liturgical element in a church meeting. Especially when it edifies believers who partake of it – rerooting us in the finished work of Jesus, strengthening us with present grace, and re-enacting and re-enforcing the unity we have with others in the body of Christ. It is the gospel in sight, taste and smell.

When it comes to doing communion in a way that engages and evangelizes unbelievers, I suggest four things:

### **1) Do it after the message, and connect the communion meal to something in the message.**

If you do communion during or at the end of the time of singing, and before the message, it is much more difficult to engage unbelievers with the meal.

One advantage of doing it after the meal is that it connects communion to the gospel more forcefully, because the preacher would have touched on at least one aspect of the gospel in their message. The person who leads the people into communion, whether the preacher or another person, can pick up on that angle and connect it to the communion.

In fact, I take it as a litmus test for good preaching that an easy connection can be made between the message and communion. For surely the preacher – regardless of what text or topic they were preaching on – would have got to Jesus and his saving work in their message. If they did not, something ghastly just happened – a Christless sermon!

I share Spurgeon's distaste for this atrocity:

'The motto of all true servants of God must be, 'We preach Christ; and him crucified.' A sermon without Christ in it is like a loaf of bread without any flour in it. No Christ in your sermon, sir? Then go home, and never preach again until you have something worth preaching.' [7/9/1876; sermon #2899]

"Leave Christ out? O my brethren, better leave the pulpit out altogether. If a man can preach one sermon without mentioning Christ's name in it, it ought to be his last, certainly the last that any Christian ought to go to hear him preach." [undated; sermon #768]

### **2) If you hold to a strict fencing of the meal, still engage non-participating unsaved people evangelistically.**

There has been considerable debate in church history on whether communion should strictly be fenced off to non-believers.

Some fence off the meal by making it clear that only believers (usually baptized believers) may partake. One reason for this is a deference for church history (the Didache and Justin Martyr restricted the Meal to the family of God alone). The other reason is the concern about incurring God's wrath based on a particular reading of 1 Corinthians 11:27-29, in which an unworthy person receives the meal at their peril. Not only apostates, and members under discipline, but also the unbaptized and the unregenerate are numbered amongst the unworthy.

The net effect of this 'fencing' doctrine means that, when communion happens, the person officiating the ritual must remind the church that only saved people may participate. How to do this so that it doesn't isolate the unbeliever and, perhaps, drive them further away by what feels like an electric fence of a ritual.

If you hold to this position, I think the most skilful way of doing this fencing is to say (as my friend Josh Kouri who leads Frontline Church in Oklahoma City shared with us when he came to our church two years ago.):

*'If you are not yet a Christ-follower, this meal is meaningless for you to eat. But we want you to see that Christ is offering himself to you. For now stay in your seats, but use this time to consider praying one of the two prayers on the screen;*

(On the screen)

A prayer of salvation

"Jesus, I choose to trust in you. You died on the cross – make me clean. You're alive, risen from the dead – make me new by your Spirit. Take me into your family and kingdom. Be my Lord and Saviour. Amen."

A prayer of searching

"Jesus, I doubt. If you're real, I'd like to know. In the next weeks I will open-mindedly read one of the Gospels and come along to gatherings like these. If you're real, take this gap in my life. Amen."

I like this approach. It gives unbelievers something meaningful to do while others take the meal, and the most meaningful thing at that – trust in Jesus or determine to investigate the gospel more carefully.

Additionally, the very fact that they are being excluded from the meal has the potential to heighten their sense of being 'outside' the family of God and make them seriously consider if they want to keep on being excluded.

**3) If you hold to a less strict fencing the table, encourage people to trust in Jesus right now and join in the meal.**

Although I don't wish to convert you if you are convinced on the matter, I must admit that over the years I have changed my mind on the matter. I have moved from a strict position to a less strict one. I don't believe the table is for unbelievers, but I don't believe it is wrong or harmful if a few unregenerate people slip through and take the bread and juice along with the saved.

The reasons I am comfortable taking a softer approach are:

- Nowhere does the New Testament directly prescribe baptism before the Lord's Supper.
- Jesus allowed even a non-Christian Judas to partake of the first ever Lord's Supper.
- In terms of church history precedence, many have effectively used communion as a chance to help people 'cross the line of faith' – most famously, John Wesley used to preach to common folk in the fields, and call them to trust in Jesus. He would invite them to participate in the meal of grace as a sign of their faith, much like a modern day evangelist might ask people to raise their hands or come to the front.
- The passage of warning in 1 Corinthians 11 is directed at believers who were trampling upon others in the body of Christ. Let me quote Michael Bird in his 'Evangelical Theology' as he speaks to this:

*'In regards to 1 Corinthians 11:17–34, much is made of Paul's warnings about partaking in an "unworthy manner," with the result that one sins "against the body and blood of the Lord," and also those who partake without "discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves." I've heard endless communion devotionals where the leader warns the congregation about not partaking if you have some unconfessed sin in your heart, abstaining if you don't know Jesus as your personal Savior, letting the elements pass you by if you're not baptized as a believer—I've heard them all; in fact, I've even said this stuff myself at times. So I say repentantly now that warnings like these have absolutely nothing to do with what Paul was talking to the Corinthians about. Imagine I held a communion service at my house where I invited the doctors, lawyers, professors, and bankers to feast on Italian herb bread and an Argentinean pinot noir in the dining room, and then rudely told the factory workers, waitresses, brick layers, and the unemployed to eat some stale bread and watered-down grape juice on the porch. That is the kind of offensive behavior that infuriated Paul. This is what it means to partake in an unworthy manner. Discriminating like this is a sin against the body and the blood of the Lord. So when Paul says that "everyone ought to examine themselves" (1 Cor 11:28), he does not mean they must make sure that you've got Jesus' flag flying in your heart, that your conscience is 100 percent pure, and that your name is on the membership rolls. No, he means to make sure you are not one of those rich folks oppressing the poor through the meal, because you are bringing judgment on yourself, as Jesus has a special*

*concern for the poor.’ I’d add to his line or argument that if an unregenerate person eats the meal without faith, I am sure we can all agree that no spiritual good has happened; but surely the same can be argued the other way: no real harm has been done either.<sup>13</sup>*

- Originally communion in the early church was taken in conjunction with a meal, and Acts 2:47 tells us that unsaved people were welcomed into these meals, in the hope they too would come to faith.
- Although it was not communion, Jesus feeding 1000s of people with bread seems to cast some light on communion: he offered them the bread, and then told them that it pointed to something higher – it represented his life, death and gift of eternal life (John 6). This offers ‘a type’ of engaging in a meal that pointed to a spiritual substance that people had not yet experienced, but were being invited into.
- Again I quote Michael Bird (in Evangelical Theology) as he makes another argument for a slightly more inclusive communion:

*‘The meal that Jesus had with his followers the night he was betrayed was itself a continuation of his earlier ministry, where meals and fellowship were a big part of his praxis and preaching. Jesus was known for banqueting with the bad. He ate with tax collectors and sinners (Matt 9:10–11)—so much so that Jesus acquired a reputation for being “a glutton and a drunkard [and] a friend of... sinners” (Matt 11:19, Luke 7:34). This brought great offense to the Pharisees, who could not understand why an otherwise learned rabbi, whom God used to do miraculous deeds, would be so unscrupulous and scandalous in the company he kept. The Pharisees were basically a religious dining club. For them, shared meals were a symbol of the cultic purity and religious propriety Yet Jesus shows no fear of impurity or contamination when coming into contact with sinners. For Jesus it is holiness that is a contagion, and divine holiness spreads and infects everything that comes into contact with it.’<sup>14</sup>*

If you take the less strict approach to fencing the table (as I do), perhaps you want to use my preferred words: *‘This meal beckons us to trust in Jesus. If you already trust in Jesus, come eat and drink. If you’d like to still do that, I suggest you pray the prayer of salvation on the screen, then come feast on his grace and mercy. If you’re not ready, consider the second prayer. There’s no pressure to take of this meal.’*

(On the screen)

A prayer of salvation

“Jesus, I choose to trust in you. You died on the cross – make me clean. You’re alive, risen from the dead – make me new by your Spirit. Take me into your family and kingdom. Be my Lord and Saviour. Amen.”

A prayer of searching

“Jesus, I doubt. If you’re real, I’d like to know. In the next weeks I will openly read one of the Gospels and come along to gatherings like these. If you’re real, take this gap in my life. Amen.”

Notice that I am *not* encouraging unsaved people to take the meal. I am encouraging people to trust in Jesus and then participate in the meal. I am creating a more inclusive ‘feel’ about the meal, which (in my mind) is more compatible with the inviting nature of the gospel – ‘Come to me’ said in Jesus. Although I am not forbidding people to participate in the meal, neither am I pressurizing them to either – in my schema the unbeliever who opts to pray ‘the prayer of searching’ rather than ‘the prayer of salvation’ understands that they are not going to participate in communion, not because I said they cannot, but because they choose not to.

***4) If you suggest people pray in groups as they do communion, be sensitive to unchurched people.***

Some churches get people to huddle in groups with cup and bread in hand. This is a generally a beautiful moment for believers (unless they are terrified of praying aloud). But it is by far the most terrifying moment for unbelievers. For one, they might not have communion to start, second they definitely are not ready to pray aloud, and third they feel like they have to pretend to be a Christian when they are not. Un until now, nothing in the meeting has singled them out like this.

As a general rule I don’t encourage people to pray in groups for this reason. But when I do, say on Easter services, or when we have just had a message about community, these little prayer huddles may be just what the Doctor ordered. When these (rare) moments arise, here’s how I suggest the meeting leader or preacher says it:

*‘Communion celebrates our union as one family. It’s a family moment. Perhaps you want to take communion on your own. That’s wonderful. But perhaps you have 2 or more people you know around you and you’d like to take communion with them. That will be great to. I suggest one or 2 of you pray a short prayer before you eat and drink. No one feel pressure to join a group or to pray.’*

## **Conclusion: God added to their number weekly**

I have written this short book to equip church leaders to reach more people far from God through their Sunday meetings.

I have always envied the early Jerusalem church. 'God added daily to their number those who were being saved' (Acts 2:47). People would join in the church meetings and would, perhaps in the first meeting or perhaps in their second or third or fourth, find themselves believing the gospel and experiencing God.

Every day, at least one more person had stumbled into the thick of the gospel and the community.

Churches in revival have shared that same testimony. Every day.

Although, I pray one day I can be part of such a church, I have long believed that I can be part of a church that has this testimony: 'God added to our number weekly those who are being saved.'

To be fair, it might take a build-up period and start with this testimony, 'God added monthly to our number those who are being saved.'

May God be with you as you make whatever changes you feel led to make.

Please give us feedback and tell us how your venture goes. We're praying for you.

## **Appendix: Standard Script Tweaks to Include Unchurched Guests**

This serves as a kind of cheat-sheet for those designing the meeting components, not to specify the exact words used each time, but to give one an idea of what they are trying to convey, and in a way helpful to unchurched people.

### **1. The initial welcome**

Greet everyone, and perhaps issue a special welcome to guests: *'Welcome everyone. Great to be here with you all. Any guests, I am especially delighted you're here. Please make yourselves at home.'*

### **2. The call to worship**

At the end of the call to worship, say, *'If you're new here, feel no pressure to participate, but I pray you too would sense....'*

### **3. Song selection**

There should be 1 or 2 songs that affirm the gospel in drama, 1 or 2 songs that lift up our gaze to God in doxology. Whether the drama or doxology comes first is irrelevant. Then after that a song that is more dynamic in its emphasis on the immediacy of God's Spirit, and a song that is more discipleship- or mission-orientated. In summary, a 4 or 5 song set should consist of 2 or 3 songs in the drama and doxology category and one or 2 songs in the dynamic and devotional category.

### **4. At the end of the singing**

As the singing time ends, while everyone is standing, and before they sit, invite people to greet each other. Be mindful how awkward this can be for newcomers. So be sure to:

- *explain the reason, for example: 'We're a church where people really matter so...'* or *'We're a church interested not just in God but each other so ...'* or *'We're a church that is a family with space for more so...'*
- *make the request less daunting: Not, 'give people a hug' or 'say hi to your friends' but 'turn around and say hi to one or two other people!'*

### **5. At the major mid-meeting welcome.**

- Repeat the words, *'To our guests, we're delighted you're here with us.'*
- If you want to get something into their hands, never ask them to put up their hands without first telling them why. Rather say, *'We'd also like to put in your hands a brochure that tells you who we are, and helps us best serve you. If you'd like one, we have a team who can give one to you – please raise your hands ... Ah, welcome and welcome. Great to have you with us.'*
- To invite them to the guest section after the meeting, do not say scary words like, *'We'd like to see how we can get you involved'* or, *'We'd like to find out more about you'*. Rather say, *'We'd also love to say hi face-to-face and treat you to some specialty coffee and a biscuit straight after this meeting right over there...'*

## **6. Taking up the offering**

- Say, *'We're going to take up the offering now. If you're a guest, feel no pressure – this is a moment for members.'*

## **7. Communion**

Just before inviting people to take communion, say one of two things:

If you hold to a strict fencing of the table: *'If you are not yet a Christ-follower, this meal is meaningless for you to eat. But we want you to see that Christ is offering himself to you. For now stay in your seats, but use this time to consider praying one of the two prayers on the screen.'*

If you hold to a less strict fencing of the table: *'This meal beckons us to trust in Jesus. If you already trust in Jesus, come eat and drink. If you'd like to still do that, I suggest you pray the prayer of salvation on the screen, then come feast on his grace and mercy. If you're not ready, consider the second prayer. There's no pressure to take of this meal.'*

In both cases, put these two prayers up on the screen:

A prayer of salvation: "Jesus, I choose to trust in you. You died on the cross – make me clean. You're alive, risen from the dead – make me new by your Spirit. Take me into your family and kingdom. Be my Lord and Saviour. Amen."

A prayer of searching: "Jesus, I doubt. If you're real, I'd like to know. In the next weeks I will open-mindedly read one of the Gospels and come along to gatherings like these. If you're real, take this gap in my life. Amen."

If you encourage people to pray together in communion: *'Communion celebrates our union as one family. It's a family moment. Perhaps you want to take communion on your own. That's wonderful. But perhaps you have 2 or more people you know around you and you'd like to take communion with them. That will be great too. I suggest one or 2 of you pray a short prayer before you eat and drink. No one feel pressure to join a group or to pray.'*

8. Follow up with people who prayed the salvation prayer:

(This is from chapter 7 of missionally potent church)

*'Those who responded, I'm excited for you. Can I suggest 4 next steps:*

- 1) Collect our gift (hold it up) – an Ignite book, a 31 day journey in the Bible for new believers. It's on the stage / at the Involvement Desk.*
- 2) Tell the person who invited you the good news.*
- 3) Come back next Sunday and the next – no one can follow Christ on their own.*

*(Another possibility is: 4) Please sms 'I begin' to the number on the screen right now – so we can pray for you and send some encouraging Scriptures to you this week.*

On the screen should be the words:

*Jesus said, 'Heaven rejoices when even one person comes home' (Luke 15:7). If you've just responded to Christ, sms 'I'm home' to 0834565543*

## **Two major guiding principles.**

### ***1. Bring energy.***

For all people who take the MIC, remember to bring energy not drain it:

- Vocal energy: speak in a way that gains and holds attention.
- Facial energy: invest expression into your communication.
- Gesticulating energy: communicate with your whole body.
- Spiritual energy / anointing: ask God for his power upon their words.
- Convictional energy: believe deeply in what you are saying.

### ***2. Fill low-energy spaces with music.***

Band, outside of the singing time, please continue to play (unless the preacher or meeting leader specifies you don't) during:

- call to worship,
- any prophetic words that are shared
- the prayer at the end of the singing time
- the preacher's prayer ministry at the end of their message
- the preacher's throwing out the net
- the benediction at the end of the meeting.

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