

HOW TO GUARANTEE

GROWTH

IN YOUR CHURCH



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Evangelistic events like Harvest Crusades are a great way to present the gospel to large groups of people, but the church needs to be inviting people to Christ every week, not just for an occasional special event.

An outreach event is really just a “shot in the arm,” a catalyst to rally the troops, a call to battle. But the ongoing work of evangelism happens in churches. In fact, what’s needed in our churches today is an evangelistic culture.

This is not something that happens naturally; it happens supernaturally. Things always default to mediocrity—never to quality. That’s true of businesses, restaurants, stores, and even the church. If you see quality, and life, and an evangelistic culture, it is there because of effort.

And that effort starts with you as the pastor or ministry leader. You cannot take people any further than you yourself have gone. As Paul told Timothy, the farmer that labors must first be a partaker of the fruit (see 2 Timothy 2:6).

How can you have an evangelistic culture in your church?

1. If you want to start a fire in the pews, begin with the pulpit.

If there is a mist in the pulpit, there will be a fog in the pews. C. H. Spurgeon said, “The Holy Spirit will move them by first moving you. If you can rest without their being saved, they will rest, too. But if you are filled with an agony for them, if you cannot bear that they should be lost, you will soon find that they are uneasy, too. I hope you will get into such a state that you will dream about your child or your hearer perishing for lack of Christ, and start up at once and begin to cry, ‘O God, give me converts or I will die!’ Then you will have converts.”

2. If you want to see people come to Christ, you must clearly explain the gospel.

You might say, “But I’m a pastor, not an evangelist!” That may be true, but Paul told Timothy to “do the work of an evangelist.” You need to specifically break down the gospel and explain it to people. Try to imagine that you

are a nonbeliever hearing it for the first time. Use language a person will understand.

There are certain elements that must be in play for the gospel to be the gospel. We need to tell people they are separated from God by sin, that Jesus died for that sin, and that if they repent and turn to Him, they can be saved. Our message is Christ and Him crucified.

Paul said, “I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation” (Romans 1:16). There is power in the simple message of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

You need to start giving invitations for people to come to Christ. This takes a commitment, because there is always the possibility of failure. But there is an even greater possibility of success. It’s worth the risk. At the end of your message should be an evangelistic “hook.” No matter what the topic, there is always a way to wrap it up evangelistically. The key is to transition to the cross. Preach this part of your message with urgency, “as a dying man to dying men.” You must trust that God will bless His Word and convict people of sin.

When Peter was preaching on Pentecost, they were “cut to the heart,” and they said, “What shall we do?” In Acts 2:38–41, Peter replied, “Each of you must repent of your sins and turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. This promise is to you, and to your children, and even to the Gentiles—all who have been called by the Lord our God.”

Like Peter, you must be intentional in your invitation, preaching for a decision.

3. You must be clear in your invitation.

This is where it breaks down for most preachers. I have heard pastors and speakers give excellent messages with a call to Christ. Then it all falls apart in “the mechanics” of it. People do not understand what you are asking them to do.

By the way, there are many ways to skin a cat. There are a lot of ways to ask people to respond to your invitation. You can have people stand up and pray, you can have them pray with you and then send them to a room for follow-up, you can have them come forward to the front and lead them in prayer. The main thing is that we call them to Christ. There needs to be a “moment of decision.” I suggest you write out your gospel

presentation in your message notes.

This is a good time to get out of “preach mode” and be conversational. Use the vernacular, as though you were speaking to a person one on one. For example,

- Would you like to have your sins forgiven? You can, right now...
- Do you want a fresh start and a new hope? God offers you that if you will just...
- Does what we’ve talked about today resonate with you? Let’s act on that...
- Are you ready to say yes to God’s invitation of love and forgiveness? Here’s how...
- Would you like to pray right now to ask Christ into your life? I will lead you...

4. You must have a follow-up system in place.

I’m talking about counselors who have been trained to encourage new believers. If a church does not have a follow-up ministry for new converts, something is not right. A church that does not have a constant flow of new believers will stagnate. New converts are the lifeblood of the church. We have a choice: evangelize or fossilize.

Here are some basic guidelines for your follow-up team.

- Offer each new believer a Bible or New Testament. If you don’t have a budget for this, get one. I can’t think of anything more important for your church to invest in.
- Train volunteer follow-up workers to go over the four basics of growth: reading the Bible, going to church, praying, and telling others about their new faith in Christ.
- Appoint a team leader or pastor to oversee these volunteers and to be someone who can take care of more difficult or involved counseling issues, if needed.
- Collect contact information for each new believer, so you can continue to encourage them. Let them know you’ll be following up with them to encourage them in their faith, send them materials, or invite them to events at your church.
- Set the expectation among your volunteers to be ready to receive new believers every week. This keeps you accountable to “cast the net” with each message, and over time your congregation will realize that every

week will present an opportunity for them to bring nonbelieving friends.

- Don't allow new believers to fall through the cracks. Set checks and balances in place to ensure that you've done what you can to maintain contact with those who want it (consider using a variety of contact methods: texting, emailing, letters, phone, or in-person visits).

5. You must start and maintain an evangelistic culture.

People always return to mediocrity, so you must not let this culture die. Ongoing evangelism is something you must do in your church. Your people must invite other people to church! In almost all cases, new converts at our crusades end up in the church of the person who brought them.

If you just announce an outreach and put out invitations, you might see some growth. But if you urge and exhort your people to bring nonbelievers, it will grow.

If you are thinking, "That just won't work in our church!" then change the culture of your church so it will. Do a series on the importance of sharing one's faith. When we were in Australia for a crusade, we were told that "invitations" were something that didn't work there, but God can and did work in Australia just like He does here.

Here are just a few other ideas for keeping evangelism alive in your church.

- Dedicate a service or a workshop to sharing your faith. Have people write out a short version of their testimony and practice sharing it with others in role play settings.
- Create and print gospel tracts that include an invitation to your church services.
- Share testimonies from new believers that remind your people how fresh, relevant, and powerful the gospel is to transform lives.
- Take an online course in presenting the gospel and encourage your congregation to do the same. (Harvest Ministries offers Tell Someone for free at courses.harvest.org.)
- Send out street-witnessing teams to locations in your community on a regular basis.

Let's all pray for an evangelistic culture in our churches.

The following is a transcription of the closing of one of my recent messages. There's nothing magical about these words in particular, but I provide it here in case it would be helpful for you to see one way to give an invitation. If you prefer to watch it instead, you can view it at media.harvest.org. The sermon title is "This Is Not a Drill" and the invitation starts around 1:13:16.

When you die, and you will (unless the Lord comes before that—and He could), but when you die you will either go straight to Heaven or you will go ultimately to Hell. I don't say that with any pleasure; I just say that because it's gospel truth. And the last thing God wants is for you to go to Hell. That's why He sent Jesus to this earth—His one and only beloved Son—and poured His judgment upon His Son. You know, we deserved the judgment. We've rebelled against God. We've defied God. We've broken the laws of God. And yet God took His only Son and put that judgment on Jesus so we didn't have to face it. Man, that's love.

And He will forgive you of any sin you've ever committed, but you must say, "God, forgive me." And this can happen for you right now.

Or if you're one of those people I talked about earlier that has kind of veered off the path—you say you're a Christian, but you are doing things a Christian should not do—you can come back to Jesus. Let's get that resolved right here, right now. Let's all bow our heads in prayer, everyone praying.

"Father, I pray now that you would speak to the heart of every person that's here, every person that's listening or watching, wherever they are. If they don't know You yet, Lord, help them to come to You now, we pray."

Now while our heads are bowed and our eyes are closed and we're praying together, how many of you would say today, "Greg, I need Jesus Christ. I want to be ready for the afterlife. I want to know that I'll go to heaven when I die," or "I need to come back to Jesus because I've been messing up." Listen, if that's your desire, if you want Christ to come into your life, if you want Him to forgive you of your sin, if you want to know that you'll go to Heaven when you die, or you need to come back to the Lord again because you've been living a compromised life, would you raise your hand up right now? Let me pray for you.

God bless you. Raise your hand up high where I can see it. Hands are going

up all over. I hope yours is one of them. This is your wake-up call. This is not a drill.

Anybody else? You need Christ in your life, you want your sin forgiven, you want to go to Heaven when you die. Raise your hand up. Or you need to come back to the Lord. Raise your hand up. Let me pray for you. God bless all of you.

You who are watching on a screen, I can't see you, but the Lord sees you. Would you raise your hand as well, saying "Yes, I need Jesus"?

Listen, every one of you that has raised your hand, saying you want Jesus Christ, I want you to stand to your feet right now and I'm going to lead you in a prayer. Stand up, wherever you are. Even if you did not raise your hand, but you need Christ in your life today, stand up. Wherever you are, stand up, and I'm going to lead you in a prayer.

This is real time, happening right now. You can get right with God. . . .

All of you that are standing, I want you to pray this prayer out loud after me. Again, as I pray, pray this prayer out loud after me. Pray these words if you would:

"Lord Jesus, I know I'm a sinner, but I know you're the Savior, who died on the cross for my sin and rose again from the dead. Jesus, come into my life. I choose to follow You from this moment forward. Be my Savior and Lord, my God and Friend. Thank you for accepting me and forgiving me. In Your name I pray. Amen."

God bless you each one of you.