

ATTRACTING A CROWD TO WORSHIP
Purpose Driven Church Conference
Rick Warren

“Enormous crowds followed Him wherever He went...” Matthew 4:25 (LB)

*“When He saw the **crowds**, He had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”* Matthew 9:36

*“The **large crowd** listened to Him with delight.”* Mark 12:37

FACTS ABOUT CROWDS

Jesus’ ministry attracted enormous crowds.

God wants His house FULL! (Luke 14:23)

No church grows without visitors.

A crowd is not a church...

BUT it can be turned into a church – if you have a strategy.

TWELVE CONVICTIONS ABOUT WORSHIP

1. Only believers can truly worship God

Saddleback definitions of worship:

“Worship is expressing our love to God for who He is, what He’s said, and what He’s doing.”

2. You don’t need a building to worship God!

“The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands.” Acts 17:24

3. There is no correct “style” of worship.

“God is spirit and His worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth.” John 4:24

4. Unbelievers CAN watch believers worship

5. Worship is a powerful witness to unbelievers if God’s presence is felt and the message is understandable.

*“... a **crowd** came together.”* Acts 2:6

6. God expects us to be sensitive to the fears, hang-ups, and needs of unbelievers when they

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are present in our worship services.

*“So if the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues, and some who do not understand or some **unbelievers come in**, will they not say that you are out of your mind?” 1 Cor. 14:23*

*“Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God.”
1 Cor. 10:32*

“Be tactful with those who are not Christians and be sure you make the best use of your time with them.” Col. 4:5 (JB)

7. A worship service does not have to be shallow to be seeker-sensitive. The message doesn't have to be compromised – just understandable!

8. The needs of believers and unbelievers often overlap. They are very different in some areas but are very similar in many areas.

9. It is best to specialize your services according to their purposes.

If we send mixed signals, we get mixed results!

Saddleback Weekend seeker services (evangelism)
 Midweek believer services (edification)

10. A service geared toward seekers is meant to supplement personal evangelism, not replace it.

11. There is no standard way to design a seeker service

What *really* attracts large numbers of unchurched to a church is:

12. It takes unselfish, mature believers to offer a seeker-sensitive service. 1 Cor. 14:19-20

The tension between “service” and “serve-us”

“Your attitude must be like My own, for I, the Messiah, did not come to be served, but to serve...” Matt. 20:28 (LB)

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HOW TO DESIGN SEEKER-SENSITIVE SERVICES

1. PLAN IT WITH YOUR TARGET IN MIND.

II. MAKE IT AS _____ AS POSSIBLE TO ATTEND.

- Offer multiple services.
- Offer surplus parking.
- Offer children's classes at the same time as the service.
- Put a map on all advertisement.

III. IMPROVE THE _____ AND _____ OF YOUR SERVICE.

- Speed it up!
- Look for ways to save time.
- Minimize transition times
- Keep pastoral prayers short.

IV. FOCUS ON MAKING VISITORS FEEL _____.

First 12 minutes – visitors decide if they'll come back
You never get a second chance to make a first impression

Your visitor's first emotion:

HOW TO REDUCE THEIR ANXIETY:

1. Reserve your best parking spots for visitors.
2. Station greeters outside your building.
 - People who project:
 - People who match:
 - Spread them out!
3. Set up an information table (or two!)

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4. Place directional signs and maps everywhere.
5. Have taped music playing when people enter.
6. Allow visitors to remain anonymous in the service.

Help them feel “*welcome and wanted*” but not watched!

7. Encourage everyone to fill out a welcome card.
Don't use registration books
 - It violates anonymity
 - It forces people to sign
 - It is more difficult to sort the names later
8. Offer a public welcome that relaxes people
9. Begin and end each service by having people greet each other
“*3 minute rule*” - greet visitors first after service
10. Make nametags available to everyone. (smaller churches)
11. Offer a refreshment table at each service.
12. Remember three keys:
 - Don't expect people to act like believers until they are
 - If you want to minister to the unchurched, you can't be shocked by them!
 - Jesus showed *acceptance* of people without *approval* of everything they did.

V. BRIGHTEN UP YOUR _____

Look at your facilities from the eyes of a visitor!

Ask: “What message is our building giving off?”

The problem: We tend to overlook things after just four weeks.

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FACTORS THAT CREATE A FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENT

1. Lighting: is it bright enough?

1 John 1:5 “*God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.*”

2. Temperature: too warm or too cold kills a service.

3. Sound: Buy the best you can afford.

4. Seating arrangements

- Provide enough space between seats.
- Let people see each other’s faces.
- Set up fewer chairs that you need.

5. Space: Don’t have too much or too little.

- Distance of the pulpit to seats: The smaller the crowds, the closer the speaker needs to be to the people.

6. Decorations: The best & cheapest are plants.

7. Clean, safe nurseries.

8. Clean, *odor-free* restrooms!

Goal: “... *so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive.*” Titus 2:10

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VI. PRINT A SIMPLE _____

The reason: it relaxes people.

Suggestions:

- Describe your service in non-technical terms.
- Include program notes that explain what is happening.
- Avoid mystical religious symbols
- Use bulletin cover with bright nature scenes.
- Use a modern, readable type.
- Print it without typos.

VII. MINIMIZE INTERNAL CHURCH ANNOUNCEMENTS

Problem: The bigger you get, the more you have!

Suggestions:

1. Train your people to read the bulletin.
2. Announce only the events that apply to everyone.
3. Screen out “in-house” terminology.
4. Avoid appeals for help.
5. Don’t conduct internal church business during the seeker service.

VIII. READ SCRIPTURE FROM A _____

Using the Bible in a Seeker Service

1. Use pew Bibles so they can find the text by page number!
2. Select scripture readings appropriate to your target.

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IX. PREACH WITH YOUR TARGET AND PURPOSE IN MIND

(Pastors can get the tapes of the two-day Purpose-Driven Preaching Seminar or attend this March 7-9, 2000)

1. Start with the _____
2. Preach in _____

Advantages

- It uses the power of
- It's easier to
- People feel more confident to

3. Plan your titles to _____
4. Provide an outline with the _____

Why?

- The unchurched don't bring Bibles.
- It relieves embarrassment in finding the text
- You can cover more material in less time.
- You can have everyone read aloud together.
- They can review it later.
- It can be the basis for small group discussion.
- We forget 90% of what we hear in 72 hours.

5. Maintain a _____ style. Don't alternate your focus between believers and seekers.
6. Choose your _____ carefully!

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X. ALWAYS OFFER AN OPPORTUNITY TO RECEIVE CHRIST AND EXPECT PEOPLE TO RESPOND!

(Details in the Purpose-Driven Preaching Seminar)

Saddleback uses the registration card as a decision card.

Suggestions:

- Clearly explain how you want them to respond.
- Be creative in inviting people to Christ. Plan out your invitations.
- Lead unbelievers in a model prayer.
- Don't overextend the invitation. It becomes counter-productive.
- Don't create artificial barriers.
- Offer a new believers table with follow-up packet.
- Expect people to respond to the love of Christ!

IS. CONTINUALLY EVALUATE AND IMPROVE

Ask: What can we do better next Sunday?

3 SADDLEBACK TOOLS YOU CAN USE

- Attendance registration card.
- Visitor's first impression reply card.
- Staff worship evaluation form.

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Saddleback Response Card

Date _____ *New Address*

PLEASE PRINT

New Email Address

Your age Group
18-12 24-29 30's; 40's; 50's; 60's; 70's; 80's

Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms

Name: _____

(If a Student) Your Current School Grade
3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 College

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Are You:
 Single Married

Email Address _____

Names of children living at home & birthdates:

Home Phone (____) _____

Work Phone (____) _____

Is this you... 1st Time? 2nd time? 3rd time?

I am: Attender Member

I came as a guest of _____

MY DECISION TODAY:

COMMENTS, REQUESTS OR PRAYER NEEDS:

- I'm committing my life to Christ.
- I want to be baptized
- I'm renewing my commitment to Christ
Enroll me in the next...
 - Class 101: Discovering the Saddleback Family
 - Class 201: Discovering Spiritual Maturity
 - Class 301: Discovering My Ministry
- I want to help at the church office
- I want to help with children's programs.

For Prayer Team confidential

I'M INTERESTED IN:

- Knowing how to commit my life to Christ
- Growing in my relationship with Christ.
- Information on this church family
- A small group
- Counseling: ___ Pre-Marital ___ Financial ___ Crisis/Marriage

ACTIVITIES:

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Children | <input type="checkbox"/> Men | <input type="checkbox"/> Bible Studies |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Junior High | <input type="checkbox"/> Women | <input type="checkbox"/> Support Groups |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Senior High | <input type="checkbox"/> Seniors | <input type="checkbox"/> 12-step Groups |
| <input type="checkbox"/> College Age (18-23) | <input type="checkbox"/> Parenting | <input type="checkbox"/> Business & Professionals |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Single Adults | <input type="checkbox"/> Single Parents | <input type="checkbox"/> Music |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Couples | <input type="checkbox"/> Child Dedication | <input type="checkbox"/> Recreation/Sport |

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This Business Reply Card is included with a welcome letter to all first time visitors

FIRST IMPRESSION CARD

Our church wants to serve you better.
Would you give us your opinion please? Thanks!

This is what I noticed first: _____

This is what I liked best: _____

This is what I liked least: _____

Age: 16-29, 30-44, 45-59, 60+

Date Attended _____

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**WORSHIP EVALUATION FORM
“Evaluate For Excellence”**

Date: _____ Service Hour: _____

OUTSIDE:

Traffic Flow: _____

Parking: _____

Directional Signs _____

Adequate Greeters _____

Cleanliness of Bathrooms: _____

Cleanliness of Grounds: _____

Information Tables: _____

Refreshments Table: _____

Other Factors: _____

ALL STARS (children’s Sunday School):

Easy to Find: _____

Adequate Info table Hosts? _____

Comments on all Stars: _____

Other Factors: _____

WORSHIP CENTER

(Physical Appearance & Atmosphere)

Cleanliness: _____

Stage & Decorations _____

Seating Arrangements: _____

Sound system: _____

Lighting _____

Bulletins _____

Ushers _____

Other Factors: _____

SERVICE:

Comments on Service: _____

Other Factors: _____

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XII. MATCH YOUR MUSIC TO THOSE YOU WANT TO REACH

Music is the #1 factor in positioning your church

My two biggest mistakes involved music:

1. I underestimated music's _____

“He put a new song in my mouth... Many people will see this and worship Him. Then they will trust the Lord” Ps. 40:3

2. We tried to appeal to _____

There is no such thing as “Christian music.”

There are only Christian _____

Suggestion for Planning Music For Seeker Services

1. _____ all your music!

Is this song doctrinally sound?

Is it understandable to the unchurched?

Does it use terms or metaphors that unbelievers wouldn't understand?

What is the purpose of this song? Who is the target?

How does it make me _____ ?

2. Speed up the tempo!

“Worship the Lord with gladness; come before Him with joyful songs.” Ps 100:2

3. Avoid singing songs _____.

4. Edit archaic terms from your songs.

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5. Don't sing _____ or _____
6. Use more performed music than congregational singing in your service for seekers.
7. If you have a choir, use it in a contemporary way.
8. Replace the organ with a MIDI band.
9. Use music for the _____ not the "art".
10. Encourage your members to _____

"Sing to the Lord a NEW song." Ps. 96:1

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ATTRACTING A CROWD TO WORSHIP
Personal Application Work Sheet

1. If you could design a seeker-sensitive service without any restrictions or limitation what elements would you include?

2. Which of these ideas could you implement immediately?

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In this session we want to talk about Attracting a Crowd to Worship and How to Design Seeker-Sensitive Services. One of the obvious characteristics about Jesus' ministry was that it attracted crowds. Large crowds, enormous crowds. The Bible calls them "multitudes." The Bible says that crowds followed Jesus everywhere. He had a magnetic quality to His ministry. In fact, one time the crowd was so huge it almost crushed Him. Another time, He fed 5000. It says in the Bible, He fed 5000 men. That was counting the men. Where you have 5000 men how many women and children do you have? At least another 10,000. So it was probably the feeding of the 15,000 when you count women and children in that particular miracle.

Matthew 4:25 says, "*Enormous crowds followed Him wherever He went.*" The Bible tells us in Matthew 9:36 "*When He saw the crowds He had compassion because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd.*" And in Mark 12:37 it says "*The large crowd listened to Him with delight.*" Seekers were attracted to the ministry of Jesus. They thronged to wherever He went even if it meant traveling a long distance.

I deeply believe that a Christlike ministry still attracts crowds today. You don't have to use gimmicks to attract a crowd. You don't have to compromise your convictions to attract a crowd. You don't have to water down the message to attract the crowd. We found you don't even have to have a building to attract a crowd. But you do have to minister to people the way Jesus did if you want to attract a crowd.

What was it that attracted people to Jesus' ministry in such large numbers? Why were they automatically drawn to His ministry?

Jesus did three things with crowds. In the first place, He loved them. Matthew 9:36 – He had compassion on them. The second, He met their needs. We see Him healing the sick, casting out demons, caring for the poor and feeding the hungry. He met their practical, personal needs. And three, He taught them in an interesting and practical way. The Bible tells us that the large crowds listened to Him with delight.

I believe that the same three ingredients – love people, meet their needs, teach them in a practical, interesting way – will draw crowds today. Here's some facts about crowds:

Jesus' ministry attracted enormous crowds.

The Bible tells us that God wants His house full. He says, "*Go out to the highways and byways of life and compel them to come in that My house may be full.*"

We know that no church grows without visitors. That's kind of an obvious thing. If you want your church to grow, you've got to get people to visit before they'll join.

I do know that a crowd is not a church. Don't ever confuse a crowd and a church. A crowd can be turned into a church if you have a purpose driven process by which you move them into maturity and ministry and mission. But a crowd is not a church. But if you're ever going to have a big church you have to get a big crowd first.

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We're going to talk about that in this session. A crowd can be turned into a church if you have a strategy.

Before we look at some practical steps in designing an evangelistic service, the kind of services that reaches many people for Christ, I want to pause and identify first the biblical basis behind what we do here at Saddleback and behind the purpose driven strategy. There are some theological presuppositions. You may look at churches and see their programs. You may see their practices. You may see their principles. You may see what they do on the outside. But at Saddleback everything we do has a strategy behind it and a theology behind it, a biblical basis for what we do. That is what gives us strength and health. Let me begin by giving you twelve convictions about worship and then we're going to look at some practical ways to build a service that attracts and reaches unbelievers, an evangelistic service. Pastor Tom Holladay is going to help me in this session.

First, you always want to figure out why you do what you do before you figure out how. When you figure out the *why* of your ministry, God will show you *how*.

1. We believe that only believers can truly worship God. Worship is from believers to God. And God, not man, is the focus of our worship. In fact here's a definition, Saddleback's definition of worship: "Worship is expressing our love to God for who He is, what He's said, and what He's doing." Unbelievers simply cannot do this. We do not believe that unbelievers can worship God. Only a believer can worship God.
2. You don't need a building to worship God. This is obvious. You'd expect this from a church that existed for over 15 years and grew to over 10,000 before they built their first building. But Acts 17:24 "*The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples made by hands.*" The temple of God is your body. Your body is the temple, not any particular building.
3. There is no correct "style" of worship. In fact, Jesus, in the Bible, only gave two requirements for legitimate worship. In John 4:24 He says, "*Those who worship the Father must worship Him in spirit and in truth.*" Those are the only two qualifiers for legitimate worship according to Jesus. In spirit and in truth. Beyond that, I think God grants enormous freedom in style.

First it must be in spirit. That means it must be legitimately from our heart, not lip service, phony, hypocrisy, saying things but thinking something else. It must be genuinely from the heart.

Then it also must be in truth. It must be doctrinally, biblically based on the word of God.

God loves to do things in different ways. We've talked about this in the last session. He enjoys variety. It's His idea to make us all different, to give us all different personalities, create instruments that make different sounds. The truth is, your worship style says more and you and your cultural background than it does about your theology. You could have the same theology

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but whether you were born in Tokyo or Nairobi or New Orleans or Los Angeles or London or Beijing will determine a lot more about your worship style than your own theology.

It is funny that every church likes to believe that its worship style is the most Biblical. We all want to think that. The fact is, there isn't a Biblical worship style. We don't even have the same instruments that they used in the Bible. And we certainly don't know how it sounded; there are no notes in the Bible. We don't know how any of the things sounded. There is no correct style of worship.

4. We believe that unbelievers can watch worship. They cannot worship but they can watch worship and they can watch believers, as we worship and observe the joy that we feel. They can observe how we value God's word and how we respond to it. Unbelievers can hear how the Bible answers basic problems and questions of life. Unbelievers can notice how worship encourages and strengthens and inspires and comforts us. And these are all good things.

5. We believe that worship is a powerful witness to unbelievers, if God's presence is felt and the message is understandable. These are two very important characteristics you see on the day of Pentecost. In Acts 2, God's presence was so evident in the disciples' worship that it attracted the attention of unbelievers throughout the entire city. In fact, Acts 2:6 tells us that a large crowd came together. We know it was a big crowd because 3000 people were saved that day. Why were 3000 people converted at Pentecost? Because God's presence was felt and because the message was something that each person understood in their own language. I believe both of those elements are essential today for worship to be a witness.

First, God's presence must be sensed in worship. More people are won to Christ by feeling the presence of God than by all the theological and apologetic arguments put together. You don't reason people into heaven. You might reason away their barriers but it's when they sense God's presence that they step across the line in their lives. That will often explode all kinds of mental barriers that they have up anyway.

At the same time, both the worship and the message must be in an understandable form that makes sense to them.

In genuine worship God's presence is felt, God's pardon is offered, God's power is displayed and God's purposes are revealed. That's genuine worship. And it sounds like a perfect context for evangelism. When those things happen, people come to Christ.

6. We believe that God expects us to be sensitive to the fears and the hang-ups and the needs of unbelievers when they're present in our worship services. This is not some modern day idea that we thought up or Willow Creek thought up or any other seeker-sensitive church has thought up. It's a Biblical principle and it's taught by Paul in 1 Corinthians 14:23 that's the famous chapter on tongues and prophecy. Paul says, "*So if the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues, and some who do not understand or some unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind?*" Paul is talking about tongues here but the principle involves far more than the spiritual gift of glossolalia. It has far more implications than that. Paul commands that tongues be limited in public worship and his reasoning is that speaking in

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tongues seems like foolishness to unbelievers. He didn't say it was foolish because it's not foolish. It's a spiritual gift. It's not foolish. But he says it appears foolish to unbelievers.

Here's the point Paul's making. This is a deeper principle than just this one issue. We must be willing to adjust our worship practices when unbelievers are present in the service. I didn't think that up, that's the gospel. That's Paul teaching the inspired inerrant word of God. We are to limit our worship practices when unbelievers are present in our midst. We must be willing to adjust it. Being seeker-sensitive in worship is a biblical command right there. Although Paul never used the term "seeker-sensitive", he definitely pioneered the idea because he was concerned about not placing any stumbling block in front of unbelievers who happen to come into a worship service. In 1 Corinthians 10:32 he says "*Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God.*" In other words, unbelievers or believers – you don't want either of them to stumble. In Colossians 4:5 he tells the Colossian church "*Be tactful with those who are not Christians and be sure you make the best use of your time with them.*"

When you have guests over for dinner, does that make you family ever act any differently? Do you serve the meal a little bit different? You may use a different set of china when you have guests in. The presentation of the meal may be more thoughtful and courteous and the conversation is courteous. You use knives and forks instead of just grabbing the food! You think of other people. You pass the food to the guests first. It maybe the same meal. It may be beans and hotdogs – but when guests are present you do it in a nicer and a different format. Are you being hypocritical because you act differently when you have guests present? No, you're not being hypocritical. You're being polite. Being seeker-sensitive does not mean being liberal, being wishy-washy, caving into culture. It means being polite. Being polite to people who don't understand religious trappings and traditions. We're not talking about changing the message. We're not talking about changing the meal. We're talking about the way you serve it up when guests are present.

7. A worship service doesn't have to be shallow to be seeker-sensitive and the message does not have to be compromised, just understandable. Making a service comfortable does not mean changing your theology. It does not mean reducing the commands or demands of Christ. They are there and they are to be taught. When you make a service comfortable it doesn't mean changing the message. It means changing the environment of the service. It's not what you say, it's how you say it.

The message is not always comfortable. In fact, sometimes the message is downright uncomfortable. When Jesus says things like, "*A man must leave his father and mother and brother and sister and take up his cross and deny himself and follow Me.*" That's not very comfortable. But I want to remind you who He said that to. He didn't say that to first time visitors. He said it almost at the very end of His ministry to people who had been following Him for three years. When Jesus met people for the first time, He didn't say, "Take up your cross," He said, "Come and see." The very first thing He said to His disciples was, "Check Me out, come and see."

That's what you want to say to a seeker right off the bat. Then as they begin to come and learn and grow you turn up the heat a bit just like Jesus did. In his 3½ year ministry He was ever increasing the commitment level. He'd raise it another notch but He didn't start out by saying,

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“Take up your cross, deny yourself and follow Me.” It was after they had watched Him do miracles and He’d fed them with bread and He’d done all kinds of things. Lets get the chronology right. We tend to take a verse that we like and apply it to everybody. The same Jesus who said, *“Take up your cross and follow Me,”* said *“Everybody who’s tied and weary come unto Me and I’ll give you rest.... Take my yoke upon you for I am meek and lowly of heart and you will find rest unto your soul.”*

We teach the whole council of God in the Seeker Service. The unchurched are not asking for a watered down message, they’re just asking for a clear message, one that’s understandable. The unchurched expect to hear the Bible when they come to church, they just want to know how it relates to their lives. People say, “We’ve got to make the Bible relevant.” I couldn’t disagree more! The Bible is extremely relevant. What’s irrelevant is the way we share it. What’s irrelevant is our style of communication. It’s totally out of date. We’re using methods from the 30’s and 40’s in the 90’s and wondering why people don’t listen.

Being seeker-sensitive won’t limit what you say but it will effect how you say it. The deepest questions of both believers and unbelievers are identical. They’re the same.

8. The needs of believers and unbelievers often overlap. They are different in some areas but they are very similar in many areas. For instance, the deepest questions of life are asked by both believers and unbelievers: Who am I? Where did I come from? What is my purpose in life? Is there meaning to life? Does my life have significance? Why is there problems and suffering in the world? Where am I going when I die? These are felt-need issues and they’re certainly not shallow. They’re the deepest kind of issues that you can deal with. They’re not shallow at all. Both believers and unbelievers need to know what God is really like. Both believers and unbelievers need to know how to have forgiveness and how to forgive others. Both believers and unbelievers need to know the purpose of life. Both believers and unbelievers need to know how to deal with suffering. Both believers and unbelievers need to know how to build a strong marriage. Both believers and unbelievers need to know why materialism is so devastating to our lives. Both believers and unbelievers need to know why I need to overcome worry and guilt and fear and boredom and bitterness and anger and how to resolve conflict.

These are not minor issues. They’re felt-need issues but they’re not minor issues. In a seeker-sensitive service you choose to dwell on issues for the most part that apply to believers and unbelievers so that whether somebody’s been a Christian fifty years or five minutes or not even a believer yet, they’re sitting there thinking, “This makes sense.” A Christian does not stop being a human the moment he’s born again. So he still has the same problems that unbelievers do. That’s what you focus on in a seeker-sensitive service.

9. We believe that it is best to specialize your services according to their purpose. In other words, design one service that primarily edifies believers and design another service to primarily evangelize unbelievers. I learned this the hard way growing up in a pastor’s home. Growing up in my dad’s church, I never knew from week to week when it was a “safe” week to bring a non-Christian because I never knew what my dad was going to be speaking on. Inevitably the Sunday that I would bring a non-Christian friend to church my dad would preach on tithing. And on the week that I wouldn’t bring a non-Christian friend my dad would preach on the cross. I

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never could figure out from week to week if this was a “safe” week. So eventually I stopped bringing people to church because I didn’t want to get burned.

Let me tell you the truth. If the members of your church were flat-out honest with you this is what they’d say, “I love my church and I love my pastor and my church meets my needs. When I go there I worship. I’m spiritually fed. I love the songs. They’re meaningful to me. The message is meaningful to me. And it meets my needs. But I wouldn’t be caught dead bringing somebody from the office to this church because it wouldn’t make sense to them.” They instinctively know that the service is not designed to bring unbelievers to. Everything from the music to the message to the prayers to the preaching to the announcements is geared toward somebody who understands in-language – Christianese.

We can motivate them to bring friends and we can pressure them to bring friends and we can make them feel guilty that they don’t bring friends but they’re still not going to bring them. Why? Because instinctively they know that the service is designed for believers. Why should I bring an unbeliever to this? If you will take the time and the energy to build a service that Christians would not be ashamed of bringing non-Christians to who have no religious background, they’ll start bringing their friends. In large numbers. Because it’s something they’re proud of. They’ll go home and say, “I wish my friend who’s having a divorce had heard that message... that song... seen that drama... that testimony.” And then they want to bring. That is attraction evangelism.

If we send mixed signals in our services we’re going to get mixed results. If we try to evangelize the lost and edify the saved in the same service, it tends to create division. It’s like you can’t chase two rabbits at the same time. You can’t aim at two targets at once. Even in our “evangelistic services” often everything we do prior to the message is geared toward believers. The prayers we pray, the songs we sing, the announcements we give. Everything is geared for the believer and then the pastor gets up and preaches an evangelistic message. By that time the unbelievers of the service have already checked out mentally. They’re thinking, “This doesn’t relate to me. It doesn’t make sense.” They’re not listening.

At Saddleback what we’ve done is we use our weekend services to be primarily for evangelism and we use our midweek services and small group primarily for edification of believers. That means two different styles of teaching, two different styles of music (whether your target is believers or unbelievers), two different kinds of prayer, announcements everything is geared in two different ways.

You say, why did you choose the weekend for evangelism? Because in our culture most unbelievers still think Sunday is the day you go to church and if they’re going to go to church any day in America they’re more likely to go on Sunday. We decided to just capitalize on it. I asked the members of our church, “When do you think most unchurched people are willing to come to church?” They said Sunday. I said, “When do you think you’re most likely to bring them?” They said Sunday. I said, “Fine. Let’s bill Sunday as a service for them and let’s use our midweek and our small group and our other studies as services for us.”

This idea of an evangelistic service is nothing new. Saddleback did not invent this. Earlier in this century, Sunday evening used to be called the evangelistic service in most evangelical,

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Protestant services. But today even believers aren't going to Sunday evening. By the millions, they're voting with their feet what they think about Sunday evening service.

10. We believe that a service geared towards seekers is meant to supplement personal evangelism not replace it. In other words you don't say, "This is where everybody comes to Christ, therefore we don't need to witness." People do find it easier, though, to decide for Christ when there are multiple relationships supporting that decision. A seeker-sensitive service provides additional support as a group witness.

When I'm out there during the week witnessing to a friend or neighbor or somebody who's cutting my hair, whatever, and I'm sharing Christ with them, then I invite them to come to church with me to a seeker-sensitive service and they walk in they go, "Look at all these people! There may be something to this! Obviously, all these people couldn't be idiots." There's power in a group witness. There are a lot of other people who believe this so there must be something to it. There is incredibly persuasive power in the crowd of believers worshipping together. That's why the larger your church gets the more effective a seeker-sensitive service you can have. Honestly, 300 people are more impressive to a non-believer than 50 are. And 500 are more impressive than 300. As your church begins to grow the power of that corporate witness becomes stronger.

11. We also believe that there is no standard way to design a seeker-sensitive service. The reason why is unbelievers are not all alike. They're very much not alike. Some seekers, some unbelievers want a high participative service. Other unbelievers want a very passive service where they sit and they watch and they don't get involved. Some want a very loud and emotional service because they're wired that way. Others want a very quiet, formal service. Some lost people need a service where it's very unstructured, very casual, relaxed and friendly. Others honestly need a formal structured liturgy; you don't sneeze unless it's in the program. That gives them stability, comfort. That's fine. That's why there is no standard way to design a seeker service.

It takes all kinds of services to reach all kinds of seekers. The style that works best in southern California will not work best necessarily in New England or in England or in Africa or Asia or South America. Even in the same city you're going to need different styles of evangelistic services to reach the different segments of that city.

There are only three non-negotiables in a seeker service. You must love unbelievers and treat them with respect. You must somehow relate the service to their needs. You must share the message in a practical, understandable way.

Those are the only non-negotiables. All the other things are secondary issues and don't get hung up on secondary issues. I've actually had people say, "We can't have a seeker service unless we get rid of the pulpit," or "We can't have a seeker service unless we get rid of the robes," or "We can't have a seeker services unless we have drama." No, these are all secondary issues. They're not really that important.

What really attracts the unchurched to church week after week is changed lives. People want to go where their lives are being changed on a consistent regular basis. At Saddleback we have

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changed lives everywhere. We don't use a whole lot of drama in this church. We don't use a whole lot of media in this church. What we do use is almost every week is a testimony.

Every church has testimonies. You have great testimonies in your church. Here's the problem. You usually share them on Wednesday night when no unbelievers are there. The wrong people are hearing them. So what we have done is actually put a testimony in the middle of my message – in the middle of the sermon – almost every week. When I get to a point that I really want to illustrate with an example, I thought “Why should I write some made up story, some drama, when I've got a real life example setting right out here?” So we bring in somebody and they work through their testimony and they write it out and they know the direction I'm going in the message. We work together with them. And they come up and they share their story. It is so powerful.

When I stand up to speak, the unchurched person looks at me and sees me as the paid professional. But when somebody gets up and shares their testimony, they are the satisfied customer. Who has more credibility with the skeptic? Week after week, we have done this for years. This constant parade week after week of changed lives, changed lives... People come who come week after week think, “There must be something in this! This isn't just a salesman giving his pitch. There's one satisfied customer after another.” We found that people will put up with all kinds of stuff if lives are being changed.

Saddleback has confounded most of the conventional wisdom about growing a church and about seeker services. We've reached thousands of unbelievers under the most unlikely of conditions. Imagine a church where the location kept changing 79 times. Imagine a church where people came and would sit in a tent for three years where they would freeze in the winter, and burn up in the summer. When the winds of fall came, they would come howling through the tent. When it would rain, the rain would often split the tent and pour it on everybody. And on Saturday night it would be so cold, people would often come in parkas like they were coming to a football game, sitting there with their little thermos and as they breathed you could see the cold air coming out of their mouth. Imagine a church where people would park up to three miles away and walk in the heat or the cold, or stand outside the tent with an umbrella week after week to listen because there were no more seats. That's why it floors me when people say, “They got that way by providing comfort for people! Convenience! They're catering to the consumer!” When lives are genuinely being changed, problems that normally seem overwhelming become a mere nuisance.

12. It takes unselfish, mature believers to offer a seeker-sensitive service. In every church there's a constant tension between service and serve-us. There's a constant battle. You have to figure out which one you're going to go for. Seeker services are often accused of catering to consumers. Traditional services do the same. You just have to decide who you're going to cater to – the old foggy believers or people who need Jesus Christ. You're going to please somebody. So don't tell me you don't cater, because you do. You cater to the people who are there. The only difference is who's needs are going to be met.

Jesus said, “*Your attitude must be like My own, for I, the Messiah, did not come to be served but to serve.*” Until that attitude of unselfishness permeates the hearts of your members, your church isn't ready to begin a seeker-sensitive service

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Based on those assumptions, Tom and I are now going to give you some practical assignments on how to design a seeker-sensitive service. Let me say right up front, these are only general guidelines. These are not the Ten Commandments. Not every one of them are going to work in your area, your culture, your background, your denomination. You have to figure out the specifics that work best in your community. We have put a lot of prayer and a lot of study and a lot of trial and error and we tweak this service almost weekly, trying to make it better. As a result nearly ten thousand people have found Christ here at Saddleback church.

How do you do that?

1. Plan it with your target in mind.

Every week we ask who are we trying to reach and it goes back to reaching Saddleback Sam. You have to define your styles – formal, informal, contemporary, traditional, high energy, low energy. You can't aim at four different targets.

2. Make it as easy as possible to attend.

Again, that's making it convenient for them to attend. In your church you want to raise the standard and lower the barriers. That's a good combination. Raise the standard of Jesus Christ but lower the barriers that people have to get through to get there to hear it. Chrysler Corporation did a study and discovered that the one thing Americans would not put up with is inconvenience. So you ask, how can we make it more convenient? How can we minimize the hassle factor?

Here are some suggestions:

Offer multiple services. Every time you offer another service you throw a hook in the water.

Offer surplus parking. In America it takes parking to reach people. We learned a very interesting thing that when people come to church in America they bring their cars. And if you don't have a place for their car, you don't have a place for them. I don't care if you can seat 10,000, if you can only park 200, you're going to have 400 people. You have to have surplus parking. Look at this campus. We had 3000 parking spots before we built the building. That shows you our priorities.

In 1981 I visited all the major churches on West Coast and asked them, What was the biggest mistake you made in ministry? Seven of them said, "Not enough parking." They never planned enough parking. If you want to know the value of a parking space, take the number of spaces you currently have and divide it into your annual giving and you'll know the amount each space is worth. And you'll get serious about parking!

Have children's Sunday School classes at the same time as the services. Unbelievers don't want to cope with kids squirming and not many unbelievers will give more than an hour of their time.

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Put a map on all your advertising so they can see it.

3. Improve the pace and flow of your service.

Speed it up. Television has permanently shortened the attention span of people today. Have you watched MTV? In contrast, most worship moves at a snail's pace. The guy finishes the song. He goes over and sits down. Five seconds later the other guy thinks about standing up. He walks over and welcomes the people. All in slow motion. You set the tempo of your services in the first five minutes.

You want to look for ways to save time. Make every minute count. We used to actually take a stopwatch and time the elements in the service and compare it to the bulletin and say "Next week we could do a little bit more on that... little bit less on that ... the announcements were too long ... the prayer could have been a little longer ... that song could have been shortened." If you double up your ushers you cut your offering time in half. It takes half the amount of time. Look for ways to save time.

Minimize transition times. You want to make the service flow. There's too much dead time in services. The difference between a good service and a great service can be summed up in one word – flow. There's got to be an impact

Keep your pastoral prayers short. In your seeker service, it's not the time to intercede for members. It's not the time to pray for Brother Bob's hernia and Sister Bertha's toenail. The unchurched can't handle long prayers so, pastor, don't use Sunday morning to catch up on your quiet time. If you're not ready, admit it.

4. Focus on making visitors feel comfortable.

One growth factor that seems obvious but it's often overlooked is this: you've got to be nice to people who show up if you want to reach unbelievers. You've got to be nice to them. In my survey, the second greatest complaint was that members were unfriendly to visitors.

A lot of people say they're friendly. What they mean is they're friendly to people who are already here. We're friendly to the people we already know. But growing churches are friendly to people they don't know.

Research has shown that a visitor's first twelve minutes make the greatest impact and determine whether he's coming back or not. You never get a second chance to make a first impression. The visitor's first emotion when they walk in the door is fear. Have you ever gone back to your old high school campus? You may have been the queen of the prom or big man on campus. You were the hero. But if you go back ten years later you're the zero. You walk onto that high school campus and you feel like everybody's watching you because they are. You can feel all those eyes and you feel very uncomfortable.

When people come to church, the first emotion is always fear. "What's going to happen to me? Are they going to make me stand up? Are they going to make me say something? Are they

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going to introduce me? Am I going to do something wrong? Do the wrong ritual? Am I going to feel embarrassed or am I going to have to give something?" You want to reduce that fear.

How do you do that? Here are some suggestions.

You can reserve your best parking spots for visitors.

You can station greeters outside your building. The most important people in your organization are those who interface with the customer. I don't care about the president of Delta Airlines. I'll never meet him. The most important Delta Airline person to me is the baggage handler, the steward or stewardess, the ticket agent – the people I have to interact with. Long before people hear your sermon, pastor, visitors are making value judgements about whether they come back or not. And you've got to make them welcome and greet them.

At Saddleback welcoming visitors is so important we have three different kinds – greeters, hosts, and ushers. Greeters are outside the building. Hosts take people to different rooms and ushers are inside the building. Three different groups of hospitality people to make sure that you can't get in that building without being greeted at least three times. You only have to have three people say "Hi" for you to think, "This is the friendliest church in the whole world!" We take a weekly survey in the church of the visitors and it always comes up: The church is so friendly.

You want to select your greeters carefully. Not just any volunteer should be a greeter. You should pick people who project personal warmth. There are people who do not have the spiritual gift of warmth. You want to get sanguines. You don't want to get melancholy people as your greeters. (How you doing? "Life stinks!") When you meet somebody for the first time, you make an impression of that person in the first seven seconds. About ninety percent of that impression is based on facial expression. You'd better get greeters who smile. If they don't smile, you're saying the wrong thing.

You need to get people who match your target, too. If you are reaching old people you should have some older greeters. If you're reaching young couples, you should have young couples greeting young couples. We used to have a thing called Patio Pal where we put kids on the patio greeting kids when they came up. Somebody their age makes them feel comfortable. We used to have a tradition where every new member of this church served as a greeter for one month. Greeters you place on the outside of the building; ushers you place on the inside.

Set up an information table or two.

Place directional signs and maps everywhere. People should not have to ask where the bathroom is.

Have taped music playing when people enter. If the music is loud, they'll talk loud. If the music is quiet, they'll be quiet. You want people talking loud at the start. Why? If you walked into this room and we were all sitting here in total silence, it'd freak you out. You'd think, "What do they know that I don't know?" On the other hand, if you walked in here and everybody's talking, you'd feel very comfortable. There's a place for silence in the worship service but it's not at the start. At the start you want to greet people. If you turn the music up,

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people talk louder and people feel more comfortable coming in. In America, people aren't used to sitting in silence. There's music everywhere – waiting rooms, elevators, every public place has music.

Allow visitors to remain anonymous in the service. Three greatest fears of Americans are going to a party with strangers, having to speak before a crowd, and being asked personal questions. In many churches you experience your three greatest fears the first five minutes you visit a church. By the way don't call them "visitors". Call them "guests". "Visitors" means you're not coming back. "Guests" mean you get special treatment. You want them to feel welcomed and wanted without feeling watched.

One of the problems is we often embarrass people without actually realizing it. Our methods of welcoming people in churches actually make them more embarrassed. How many times when a visitor comes in do we say, "Stand up. Tell us who you are. Tell us your name. Put on a sticker that says I'm different. I don't fit here. Let's all look at this odd ball over here." We think we're making them feel comfortable. They're dying a thousand deaths.

I'm not afraid of crowds. I've spoken in the superdome a couple of times. So I'm not afraid of big crowds. But when I go on vacation with my wife and family and we visit a church and they say, "Would all the visitors stand up?" my wife looks at me and I say, "I'm not standing up!" Why? It's not that I'm afraid of crowds. It's that when you do that you feel like a real duffus. And I'm thinking that and I'm a pastor, what about a total non-believer in a church service? I've discovered that the only people who actually like to be recognized in a service are denominational people. But real people don't like it.

I was a member of a church where the pastor decided that having people stand was a bad idea so he reversed it. He said what we'll do is have all the members stand. Visitors stay seated. Then we'll sing a song to the visitors. Get this: I'm setting here as a first time visitor and everybody stands up. I'm looking around and all I can see is a bunch of big fat fannies at eye level. Then they turn around and look at me and start singing, "We're so glad to have you. We're so glad you're here." I'm dying a thousand deaths. I get embarrassed if my wife sings to me much less a total stranger. Tom and I know a guy who's now on staff here that went to a little church. He was sitting there and they asked all the visitors to raise their hand. He raised his hand and they came back and took this little fur ball and stuck it on his shoulder. He's looking at this thing and then the pastor says, "We wanted you to feel welcomed. We wanted to give you a warm fuzzy."

People love to be greeted personally but not publicly.

Encourage everyone to fill out a welcome card.

Offer a public welcome that relaxes people

Begin and end each service having people greet each other.

Make nametags for everybody. We don't do this anymore. We used to when we were smaller. If you do that, don't make members have a first class nametag and visitors a little peeley ones that you rip it off and it tears your shirt.

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Offer a refreshment table at each service. We discovered that visitors leave the service in about 3.2 seconds. But if you get them to stay longer, put a cup of coffee and a doughnut in their hand and they'll stay a couple of minutes. That's a long enough time for me to get one of my members there to meet them, greet them, welcome them, to get them to talk a little bit more. In America, it's not socially comfortable to stand without something in your hand. That's why we have cocktail parties. They walk around with these little-bitty drinks. I don't know why but psychologically you can take a 300-pound bruiser and he's standing in a crowd but as long as he's got a Styrofoam cup in his hand he feels ok. As if the thing is hiding him! Because he standing there with his little cup and if somebody looks at him, he has something to do.

Offer a refreshment table. Study how many times Jesus taught while He was eating or walking. Why? Because eating and walking are two of your most relaxed times. When you're relaxed communication can get through.

Remember three keys:

1. Don't expect people to act like believers until they are.
2. If you want to minister to people you can't be shocked by them.
3. You've got to know the difference between acceptance and approval. You can accept people without approving of their lifestyle. Jesus accepted everybody: lepers, perverts, prostitutes, homosexuals. He accepted everybody. He didn't approve of their lifestyle. He told the woman caught in adultery, "*Go and sin no more.*" You can accept people without having to approve of everything they do. That's the first step in reaching seekers.

Tom:

What do you do that helps those who have never been to church before feel like, "This fits me and I can hear the message here."

5. Brighten up your environment.

Go home to your church and try to look at your facilities through the eyes of a visitor, through the eyes of someone who has never been there before. It will frighten you, some of the things you will see. Ask yourself the question, "What message is this building giving off?" Very often the message that we want it to give off is exactly the opposite of what it's giving off. We want our building to say, "We care." But our building says, "Nobody cares." We want to say, "We're up to date." But our building says, "Everything is out of date." We want to say, "We're friendly." But our building says, "We're cold." Look at the facilities and ask, "What can we change around her?"

We have to understand the problem that we all go through in this. We tend to overlook things especially in a building after about four weeks. This happens in our home. You've got a door that squeaks and drives you bananas the first couple of times you hear it squeak. After about four weeks, you don't even notice it anymore. A visitor that comes will notice. There's lots of

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things in our churches, that when you go through and notice them you can find some ways to brighten them up.

On the next page are some ideas for doing that. Some factors that create a friendly environment.

1. Look at the lighting. Is it bright enough? Some of you could go home and change the light bulbs from 75-watt to 100-watt and people would come in Sunday and say, "Revival! Something happened here! God is here in a new way this week!" Little things make a big difference.

2. Look at the temperature. Is it too warm or too cold? Always remember that especially in the summertime, when people first walk in it's going to be a little too cold. Then you get all those bodies in there and it warms up a little bit.

3. Look at the sound

4. Seating arrangements. Make sure you're as close to people as you can. Don't be too far away.

5. Look at the space: don't have too much or too little. Sometimes if you have chairs you'll want to remove some so that when people come in you have to add chairs. Don't have so many chairs set up so that it's depressing and you feel like no one's here.

6. Look at the decoration in your church. What is it that makes the place feel exciting? The best and cheapest decorations are plants, something green. People walk in and see that at least something's alive in there. They feel good from the beginning.

7. Clean and safe nurseries

8. Clean and odor-free restrooms.

These are things to think about through the eyes of a person who's coming for the first time.

6. Print a simple order of worship.

Why? Because it relaxes people. It relaxes people who have never been before to know where this thing is headed. It's a way of expressing to them in terms that they can understand what's going to happen in the service. We have, you might call it a Living Bible version of worship. We say it in ways that they can understand.

Many times the order of worship is not written for someone who's never been before. They use terms like "supplication" and "benediction" (and they think that sounds like the eggs they had for breakfast). We have to say it in terms they understand. So if we have a song at Saddleback we call it A Song. Pretty simple. If we have another song, we call it Another Song. You don't have to be complicated about this.

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Describe the service in non-technical terms. Include program notes that explain what's happening so you don't have to explain things again and again every week. Every weekend our bulletin has a program note that says, "If you're with us for the first time, during the offering we don't expect you to give. You came to get something today. The offering is for our members and those who are part of the Saddleback family." Put that in there and things like that so they'll know what's happening.

Avoid using symbols they don't understand. Bulletins with covers of bright nature scenes make people think, "God and nature; those go together." Especially for those who have never been to church before. Use a modern readable type. I don't know why it is that churches are the only ones using Gothic type anymore. We need to change that. Watch out for typos. When "He Keeps Me Singing" becomes "He Keeps Me Sining" it loses something.

7. Minimize internal church announcements.

If you're not careful they become eternal church announcements. The problem is the bigger you get as a church the more you have. And it's very easy to let those announcements begin to overwhelm the service. So you have to train people to read the bulletin, that they are going to miss things if they don't read that program.

One of the rules we try to apply as much as we can is to announce only events that apply to everyone. If you announce, for instance, the Women's Retreat that's coming up all of a sudden the men stop listening. If you announce the youth event that's coming up, all of a sudden anybody who's not a youth or a parent of a youth stop listening. Then by the end of the announcements, nobody's listening. You try to focus on things that apply to everyone. Screen out in-house terminology like WMU – they don't know what that means. You have to explain it to people. Avoid appeals for help. They don't work very well from the front. They work better person-to-person. Don't conduct internal church business during a seeker service. There's some churches that try to have a seeker service and then say at the end, "All of you who are guests, would you please leave while we talk about some things we don't want you to know about." That's scary for people.

8. Read Scripture from a newer translation.

Whatever translation is your favorite, that's fantastic. But remember we're trying to communicate to those who haven't been to church before. So you want to read scripture from a translation that they can understand. There's no excuse for complicating the good news of Christ by 400 year old English that's not understandable to those who have never been to church before. As beautiful as it may be to you.

A few suggestions: You might want to use pew Bibles so they can find the page by number. That can be very helpful. Often a seeker will come into church. They've never been before and you say, "Let's turn to the book of Job." They have no idea where it is. But they happen to be sitting next to the state Bible dill champion of 1953!

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The scripture reading in the service for unbelievers select scripture passages that show the benefits of knowing Christ. What better could you read than one of the many scripture passages that show how great it is know Christ as Lord.

9. Preach with your target and purpose in mind.

We're not going to focus as much (for you pastors) on some of the things we could talk about here but you can get tapes on a two day conference that Rick has done on this or join us for a conference in March of 2000. I can't think of a better way to spend your time with something you have to do each and every week.

What do you think about when you focus on that target and that purpose?

1. First of all you start with the needs of those that are listening. You may need to go sit in a mall as you prepare a sermon. You may need to sit and watch cars go by. Whatever it takes to help you focus on those who are going to be listening. Focus on their needs. Take out the morning newspaper and read through it. It's not hard to see what people's needs are.

2. It strengthens reaching your target to preach in series in this service. There's some great advantages of this. It uses the power of momentum. It enables you to build on what has happened last week so that people can invite people. If they get excited the first week about a message, they invite their friends. It's also much easier to advertise. You can advertise a single series for five weeks, build a single advertisement around it, to let people know what you're going to talk about during those weeks. It also helps people feel a lot more confident to invite their friends. They know what's happening the next week. They know what happened in their lives the week before.

3. Plan you titles to appeal to the unchurched. Realize that the title helps them to understand, if they've never been to church before what's going to happen in this service. If they hear a title like "Reckoning the Old Man Dead" we know what that means but they think it's a funeral service for their father. They don't understand it.

4. Provide an outline with the verses written out. We provide a simple 8½ by 5½ outline with the scripture verses on it. The main reason to give them an outline:

They're not bringing a Bible with them to church. And pastors, as important as your outline is, the scriptures that are on there are much more important. They've got the word of God in their hand they're able to see some of the verses that you're reading through and you know the power of God's word to change people's lives. They don't bring their bibles to church

Because they're embarrassed at finding the text

Because it helps you to be able to cover more material in less time, have an outline for them.

It also helps you to have people read the Bible together during the message. There's so many translations out there we can't do that anymore but if you print it up for them we can all read it together.

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Then can review it later

It can even become the basis for a small group discussion.

We forget about ninety percent of what we hear in 72 hours. If you give them something to read you get a ten-percent better retention rate. You double the retention rate just by putting something in their hands where they can read it. Provide them an outline.

5. Maintain a consistent style. In this service for the unchurched you don't want to alternate your focus between believers and seekers. People get sort of spiritually schizophrenic if you do that. It's a little confusing. If you go from a series on "Stress" to a series on "Expository Gems from the book of Leviticus", it's confusing of people. If you go from a series "What God says About Sex" to "The Beast in the Book of Revelation" it's confusing. There may be a connection but it's confusing.

5. Choose your replacements carefully. Very carefully. Why? Because it only takes one time, one wrong person, one time getting burned to turn an unchurched person off. It only takes one time to make people think, "I don't know if I can feel safe inviting my friends."

10. Always offer an opportunity to receive Christ.

Expect people to respond. Why have a service for people who don't know Christ and not offer the opportunity to come to know Him? That's what it's all about. Saddleback uses the registration card as a tool to help people make that commitment, to make that decision. At the end of a service after leading them through a sinner's prayer, we'll say something like, "Would you take this card and on the back mark the box that says I'm committing my life to Christ. We want to contact you. We want to encourage you."

You ask "What about their public commitment to Christ?" We don't have a come-forward invitation. What about their public commitment to Christ? That's they're baptism. That's what baptism is all about. We help them understand the public commitment that's in baptism and the significance of that. We're able to follow upon them based on this decision card.

In that time of response you want to explain carefully how you want them to respond. They've never been before. They don't know.

Be creative. You can't do it the same way every week because people begin to tune things out.

Lead them in that model prayer.

Don't overextend the invitation. You've been in those church situations. Maybe all of us have done it ourselves a time or two. There's that battle of the wills between the pastor and the guy in the back row and the longer the pastor extends it the tighter the guy grips that pew. You just trust the Holy Spirit in that case and watch Him work like only He can.

Don't create artificial barriers.

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We do offer a new believer table. We don't have a "come forward" invitation but a "go back" invitation. On the way out of church, we say, would you go by that new believers table and pick up some materials that will help you grow in this new commitment. The people at that table are trained to begin to follow up the people on their decision right then.

As you offer this invitation you want to expect people to respond to the love of Christ. Expect them to respond. There's something about our faith when we're challenging commitment in people's lives that in the sovereignty of God He uses our faith to break down the barriers in people's hearts. That expectation is key.

One of the most crucial elements of a seeker service...

11. Continually evaluate and improve.

Ask yourself what you can do better this next Sunday. We've talked throughout this session about three tools we use.

We do use an attendance or registration card. You might have asked earlier, "If you don't welcome your visitors publicly, how do you get their names so you can follow up on them?" We have all our members fill this out every week along with the people that are new. This is where we get their names so we can follow up. It's also a great tool of communication. People write prayer requests, what's happening in their lives, information to the church. This is probably the number one communication tool in the church for the people that are coming. If you're going to do this, you're going to get some strange ones – you have to be ready for that. A couple Rick got just recently: "Please pray for my parents who are going to hell. Please visit them." And "Our son got to meet Rick Warren for the first time. Please pray that God will take away the pain."

A first impression card is something we give out to people who come the first time so they can send back and share with us the impressions they had of the service. We're not always just listening to those who are already coming to church but those who are coming for the first time.

And also a staff evaluation form.

Rick:

All these factors are important but the most vital factor in building a seeker service is the next point.

12. Match your music to the people you want to reach.

It needs to fit your target group. Music is the number one positioning factor in your church. Without even attending your church tell me the style of music you're using and I can tell you right now without ever attending who you're reaching and who you're never going to reach. It is the single most important factor for an evangelistic service. Many different kinds of people will listen to your preaching, pastor. But the moment you choose a music style, you're deciding who

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you're going to reach and who you're not. No music is going to appeal to everybody so whatever you choose you're saying no to somebody.

I'm often asked, "If you were starting a church over, what would you do differently?" My two biggest mistakes in ministry here at Saddleback involved music.

In the first place, in the early days, I underestimated the power and the importance of music. A song can often bypass intellectual barriers and go straight to the heart. A song can do things that words can never do. They may have all kinds of resistance and barriers up against what I'm saying but if you get the right song, all of a sudden a tear starts. It has bypassed the intellect and gone straight to the heart with the message.

I read this last week, "In 25 years in working with the brain I still cannot effect the person's state of mind the way that one simple song can." It is a powerful tool for evangelism. The Bible says in Psalm 40:3 *"He put a new song in my mouth. Many people will see this and worship Him. Then they will trust the Lord."* Notice the correlation between new music and evangelism. When I get a new song that says God's doing something new in my life many people will see and worship Him, then they will trust the Lord. Music is a powerful evangelism tool. Aristotle said, "Music has the power to shape character." And today the lyrics of rock and roll have shaped the values of an entire generation of Americans. And contemporary music is a force that we cannot ignore. It is the number one communicator of values in the world.

I have traveled all around the world and there is now a universal music. It's pop rock. Just as in the days of Jesus there was a universal language – Greek – there is a universal music around the world. Whether you go to Tanzania or San Palo or Tibet – anyplace – and you turn on a radio, you can hear the same tunes. All around the world. If we ignore that potent force and say "That's the devil's music," we're giving the devil the most powerful tool for communicating values, and advocating it to the wrong source.

The other mistake that we made when we started Saddleback was we tried to appeal to everybody's musical taste. We used to go from Bach to rock in a single service. We'd do a hymn, then we'd do a praise chorus, then we'd do a little easy listening, then we'd do a rap, a heavy metal, a country western, a classical, then back to another hymn. All I did was make everybody's stomach church! And make them all mad.

You say, "Can't you blend the music?" Yes, blending the service is possible. But it's like kissing your sister – you could do it but who'd want to? Why would you want to when you could have much more impact by specializing your services. Do a couple of services with two different styles of music.

We were going nowhere with this blending stuff. Finally in 1984 I passed out a little white card to everybody in the church. I said write down the call letters of the radio station you listen to. When I got it back it was so overwhelming – 96-97% said, "I listen to adult, middle of the road pop-rock music." It wasn't on the edge, just something with a beat. It's the stuff you hear on all the commercials. These are Christians I asked. If this is what they're listening to what are the unchurched listening to? I didn't have a single person say, I listen to choir music on the radio. Not one Christian!

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So we made a strategic decision in 1984 that we were going to be a pop rock, contemporary Christian music service. We are un-apologetically contemporary and we are loud. Why? Because baby boomers don't just want to hear the music they want to feel it. We have a saying here that if it's too loud, you're too old! I got a letter from a lady in Leisure World. The average age is in their 70's. It says "Dear Pastor Rick, We particularly enjoyed the joyful music and want to thank Rick Muchow, the music man, for stirring up our geriatric blood."

We made a shift. We don't do hymns. We don't do traditional music. We write most of the music here. I'll be honest with you. We have lost hundreds – *hundreds* – of potential members because they didn't like our music. But we've reached thousands! We bit the bullet and said we're not going to try to appeal to everybody. We're going to the style that matches our target.

The only wrong style is the style you use simply because the pastor likes it. You'd better figure out what's the style of your target and use that whether you like it or not.

We have daughter churches that are country-western churches. They play kicker music. We've got a church that uses a lot of rap. It depends on who your target is. Ninety percent of all records sold today are adult contemporary, pop rock music. Only two percent of all the albums sold today in all the world are classical. I'm not about to use a style of music that appeals to two percent of the population. I don't care how sophisticated it seems.

You need to realize that if you want to reach people under 45 they don't understand any music prior to 1960. To a baby boomer, a classic is Elvis. They're used to music with a strong beat and a strong base line. The major issue in church growth in the next decade is going to be what kind of music do we use in our churches. The battle lines are already being drawn right now. Who are we going to appeal to with our music? The tide is already turning.

You need to understand that the music that the traditional people think right now is tradition was once contemporary. And two generations before thought the stuff was liberal and modern and vulgar. You need to expect disagreement.

James Dobson said of all the topics he's talked about on the Focus on the Family radio broadcast – pornography, abortion, you name it – the single most controversial issue he's ever talked about was music in the church. It's not by accident that Spurgeon used to call his music department, the war department. And I want to remind you that the first murder occurred over a worship practice. Cain killed Abel because he didn't like the way he worshipped and his sacrifice was more acceptable. And brothers have been spilling the blood of brothers ever since.

Why is that? When you attack my worship style I take that personally because it involves my personality. It's the way I express my love to God. If I attack your worship style I'm really attacking you. Because it represents how you get in touch with God. It's very personal. We get very defensive about this.

Let me tell you something that ought to shatter a few myths.

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There is n such thing as Christian music. There is only Christian lyrics. Only Christian words. I could play a record and if it didn't have any words, you wouldn't know if the song were Christian or not. The tunes are not sacred the beats are not sacred. It's the words that make something sacred. All around the world, in a thousand different cultures, Jesus Christ is worshiped and praised every Sunday in many different appropriate worship styles. As I said earlier, there are no notes in the Bible. We don't know what tunes they used in the New Testament.

Sometimes I hear people say, "I think we need to get back to our roots." I want to say, "How far back do you want to? The Gregorian chant?" What they usually mean is they want to sing the songs they grew up on as a little kid. They only want to go back 30-40 years, not 200, or 600 or 1000 years.

What if my roots are in Asia? What if my roots are in Africa? To insist that all good music came out of Europe 200 years ago is at best cultural elitism. At worst, it's racism! It's not true. There's no such thing as good music. A guy who's playing a little harp, a stringed instrument, if it's getting him in contact with God it's good. And God's saying it's good. So you don't have to be judgmental on other people's worship style. For 2000 years the Holy Spirit has used all kinds of music and to insist that one particular style is the right kind...there's a word for that – idolatry. It's taking a human thing and making it sacred. And it's not.

Realizing that I'm walking though an area filled with landmines (I've probably already offended half of you already) let me give you some suggestions for planning your seeker-service music. Regardless of the style you choose and there are many appropriate styles, you need to remember these things.

1. Preview all your music. Before you let anybody on that stage to sing a song or play a number you need to preview it first. The wrong kind of music can kill a service. How many of you pastors have had to resurrect a service after a special number that went south? This is so important because music is 30-40-50% of your service. And it's the first 50% of your service. And if you loose the unchurched's attention in that half they're not coming back for the message. It's very important to preview it up front.

I learned this the hard way. The church was just months old. I had a volunteer music director who said, "My son plays the guitar. Would you like to have him come do a special number?" You're always hurting for specials so I said great. I didn't preview him. When the guy walked in the door that morning, I knew I was in trouble. Punk rocker! Tight black leather jeans. Chains on his arms. Guitar slung low. Spiked orange hair. And we had set him up to open the service. We often open the service with upbeat, God is alive music. He got up and opened the service with a 20- minute song on nuclear disarmament. I'm sitting on the front of the stage praying, "God, get me out of this *please!*" I wanted to stand up and say, "Folks, let's just admit it. God's not here. Go home! Come back next week!" There was no way that service was going to be resurrected.

I have a friend who had a very famous singer (we've had him here at our church) and he sang in another church in San Diego – Pat Boone. It was Easter Sunday. They had a great crowd with all the seekers there. Before he got up, Pat leans over to my friend Sam and says, "I wrote a new

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song. I want to sing it. It's called *Everybody Dies*." Sam said, "Pat, it doesn't sound like an Easter song." Pat said, "God's in it." and he sang it. Sam said, "I'm the one who was dying!" He said he saw all these women getting up and walking out of the service. So Sam's wife follows the women in the restroom. Sixteen women. They'd all lost their husbands the previous year. What died that day was the service. Preview your music!

Here's some questions you want to ask?

Is the song doctrinally sound?

Is it understandable to the unchurched? If you talk about being washed in the blood of the Lamb? Or "There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Emmanuel's veins and sinners plunged beneath the flood lose all their guilty stains"? Explain that one! You've got a blood bath there.

Here's the point: You know the power of the atonement, I know the power of the atonement but an unbeliever singing that song is going to go, "What are these people thinking? What's a dead lamb doing in the middle of the aisle anyway?"

Does it use terms or metaphors that unbelievers wouldn't understand?

What is the purpose of the song? Who is the target?

How does it make me feel? Music affects your emotions even if you don't listen to the words. If you want to build a service up and create a celebration atmosphere you don't want to sing, "I'm just a poor lonesome wayfaring stranger." You need to have music that compliments the service.

2. Speed up the tempo. The Bible says "*Worship the Lord with gladness come before Him with joyful songs.*" Many hymns sound like a funeral march. You can drain the life out of a song by just slowing it down. You don't have a festival, you've got a funeral. We Baptists have a song in our hymnal "One Day". It's seven verses. If you slow down that sucker it'll take forever.

At Saddleback we speed it up. We joke about our aerobic singing. You cannot go to sleep during the music in this church. Maybe the message but not the music.

3. Avoid singing songs in a minor key. If you want your seeker service to be uplifting and upbeat, it requires bring, happy, cheerful music. We've come to celebrate, not to commiserate. Psalm 115:17 "*Dead men do not praise the Lord.*" Neither do dead churches!

I know some of you are thinking, "What about some of those fast Jewish praise songs in a minor key?" Yes, they're fast. Yes, they're peppy. But just because they're fast and peppy doesn't mean they're contemporary. Americans are not tuned to minor key music. In other cultures they are but not Americans. We prefer bright, happy, cheerful music. By the way, a lot of the contemporary hymns, contemporary choruses, aren't seeker-sensitive either. They don't mean

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anything to anybody. Jehovah Jirah to an unbeliever is Mumbo-bagumbo! It means nothing. Big deal.

4. Edit archaic terms from your songs. I'm talking about old words and phrases that unbelievers wouldn't understand. If you use hymns in your services, I'd suggest you print the words in your bulletin so you can change the words that are out of date. Things like "Here I raise mine Ebenezer" Good night! Most Christians don't know what an Ebenezer is either, much less an unbeliever. "All hail the power of Jesus' name. Let angels prostrate fall." That poor angel! His prostate has been falling 200 years! Somebody help the dude! "Visions of rapture [rupture?] on this terrestrial ball." (!!!) I love these songs and you do too. But tell me what the last verse of "Holy, Holy, Holy" means. "Cherubim and seraphim falling down before thee who wert and art and evermore shall be." Huh??? Oh, yeah! Hubert and Art and Evert More Shelby? I know those guys!?!?! My youngest son when he was younger said, "Dad when are we going to sing the song about the Ninja Turtles? – Lead on Oh kinky turtle." *King eternal not kinky turtle!*

Go home, grab your hymnbook, flip through and tell me which of the songs are seeker sensitive and which aren't.

Every once in a while we will throw in a hymn like "Great is Thy Faithfulness" and say it's a Blast from the Past, a Golden Oldie. We kind of salute our heritage and march on!

I know some people say those hymns have good theology. I agree. I challenge you to write some good theology to some new tunes. Dress up some of those old friends in new tunes. You like the words? Fine! Put a new tune to it. Who says the tune has to stay the same?

John Calvin hired two secular song writers to put his theology to music and the queen of England was so incensed with these contemporary song that she derisively referred to John Calvin's tunes as Calvin's Geneva jigs. Handel's Messiah was roundly panned as vulgar theater and was considered a vulgar song because it was too repetitive. There were over 100 Hallelujah's in it. It just says the same thing over and over. I hear that one about modern choruses. It just says the same thing over and over.

5. Don't sing too much or too little. I mean either extreme can limit the reach. You've got to maintain balance. If you sing too much, the unchurched check out. Honestly, to ask a nonbeliever to sing songs, words he doesn't know to tunes he doesn't know, if we have a 45-minute praise service he can't sing "I love You Lord and I lift my heart." That's getting the cart before the horse. He doesn't love the Lord yet. How can you expect him to sing 45 minutes of praise? That is not a seeker-sensitive service.

Unchurched people don't like to sing songs they don't know to tunes they don't know to words they don't understand. They do like to listen to music. In your service you want to major on preformed music rather than on congregational music. I love to sing. Sometimes in our midweek service we'll go 45-50 minutes of uninterrupted praise. That's for believers. But when unbelievers are present in the house you need to adjust your worship practice. They like to listen so you have trios and duets and choir numbers and solos and things like that.

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On the other hand, having too little music robs your service of an emotional element that God wants to use. If you say, “We want to reach seekers so we’re only going to sing one song each week,” I think that’s a mistake. Music can often do things that messages cannot.

6. I said already, use more performed music than congregational singing in your service for seekers. The one exception is this: the larger your church gets the more congregational singing you can do. The church doesn’t feel put out. If I’m a businessman, standing with 50 people and I’m the only one not singing, I feel very self-conscious. I know I’m not singing and so does everybody else. They’re all looking at me. On the other hand, in a service like this, if I don’t sing, who cares? Nobody’s watching you. You can actually do more music, the larger your church gets.

7. If you have a choir use it in a contemporary way. We have a choir and we use it at least once a month. But it’s a rock choir, a gospel choir. How many pop songs on the radio feature fifty voices? Very few. The exception is when you use a choir to back up a lead singer as in Winona Judd’s “*Love can Build a bridge*” or Michael Jackson’s “We are the World” – songs like this where you have a soloist backed up by a choir. That’s the 1990’s - 21st century way to use a choir. Not to let a bunch of voices sing but let them back up a soloist or a couple of soloists. Use them that way. There’s great power in that.

If possible don’t let your choir remain behind the pastor while he preaches. It’s very distracting. He’s up there preaching his heart out and they’re back there picking their nose, fiddling with their earring, cross eyed, counting the tiles on the ceiling, scratching in places you shouldn’t be scratching. You may be preaching the good news but their bored expressions are saying the opposite. There’s a very famous preacher that I respect that has been on television for years. He’s a great preacher. He always had the choir behind him and there was this old guy who’d fall asleep every week. He was back there sawing logs! I thought, “Get a clue! The guy behind you is invalidating everything you’re saying! Move him off stage!” If you use a choir you need to tell them that it’s more important for them to smile than sing. Why? Because they may not hear your individual voice but they will see your individual smile.

A very famous church had a choir member have a heart attack in the choir loft and froze solid. Rigor mortis set in. They called in the paramedics who carried off half the choir before they found the right guy!

8. Replace the organ with a MIDI band. As I told you, I’ve not found one survey that said, “I listen to organ music during the week.” We invite people to come to church and set on 17th century chairs called *pews* and listen to 18th century music called *hymns* played on a 19th century instrument called a *pipe organ* and then wonder why they think we’re out of date!

MIDI takes music and puts it digitally on a little disk. You can plug it into a keyboard and it will play, sounding like you’ve got a full orchestra. If I were starting today, if I had a MIDI machine when we started Saddleback we would have really grown! The neat thing about MIDI is you can choose the instruments you want to play. Let’s say you’ve got some instrumentalists in your church – a drummer and a tuba player. That isn’t going to be a whole lot but the MIDI will play the keyboard part, the trumpet part, the violin part, take out the tuba and drums. On top of that

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this thing cost 1/1000 of what a pipe organ would. And you can still get all the majestic sounds of the pipe organ for your weddings and funerals. It's good stewardship.

9. Use music for the heart not the art. The goal in music is to communicate in ways that people understand. It's not to impress people with your social sophistication. Use it for the heart and not the art.

I heard about the farmer who went to church in town. When he came home, his wife said, "What did you do?" He said, "I heard an anthem." She said, "What's an anthem?" He said, "It kind of like this. If I said to you, "Oh, Mary! The cows are in the corn. The jersey cows. The cows are in the corn." That would be a hymn. But if I said to you, "Oh, Mary! Mary! Mary! The cows are in the corn. The corn, the corn, the corn! The jersey cows, the white cows, the black cows! The cows!" That would be an anthem.

10. Encourage your members to write new songs. The Bible says "*Sing a new song to the Lord.*" The problem is many churches are still singing the same old songs. Predictability kills. Overuse drains a song of its feelings. Columbia records did a study and discovered that once you sing a song fifty times you stop thinking about the words. It loses its meaning. It becomes attached to a memory. There are certain songs that are that way for me. They bring up childhood memories, memories of certain spiritual events in my life – "Victory in Jesus", "I Surrender All", "Just As I Am," "So Send I You." There are certain songs like "Blessed Assurance" that tears just automatically start coming into my eyes. They are attached to meaningful moments in my life. But they mean nothing to an unbeliever. Am I going to sing a song in a seeker service for my tears or for their edification, one that they can understand?

Every spiritual awakening throughout history has always been accompanied by new music. Study church history. Every time there's a flat-out, Holy Spirit inspired revival it's always accompanied by new music – Luther, Wesley, Finney, you name it. The Jesus movement. New songs say God is doing some new right now. It's not just the faith of our fathers. It's God's doing something new right now. The most effective songs today are the love songs that are sung directly to God. One of the reasons I like a lot of the new stuff is that hymns sing about God. A lot of new stuff sings directly to God. We sing a song to the Lord. When people sing a song that is felt deeply it is a powerful witness to unbelievers.

If you think people are really worshipping with your music, I challenge you to next week when the music starts to get somebody with a video camera and stand at the front and pan the expressions of the people as they sing. And then tell me if they're really thinking about that music or if it's become so rote that their minds just check out. When you sing songs that create harmony it creates intimacy even in a large crowd and God can do great things.

[end of tape]