Back To Church Sunday: Invite Someone!

Isaiah 55:1-3; Revelation 22:12-17; John 1:35-42; Psalm 146 September 9.2018

 How many people do you know who “used to go” to church, but just don’t anymore? If you are like most folks, you probably know quite a few. Today there are 328 million people in America and as many as 80% of them identify themselves as Christians, yet only 20% actually attend church from week to week. (<https://churchleaders.com/pastors/pastor-articles/139575-7-startling-facts-an-up-close-look-at-church-attendance-in-america.html> ) Clearly, most people who don’t attend church did attend at one time. Many of these people might be willing to try church again, given the right opportunity.

 National Back to Church Sunday is designed to be that opportunity—a special service dedicated to people who do not regularly attend church, a time when those who have left the church are encouraged to return and give it another try.

 According to a couple studies (one by LifeWay research and one by Barna Research), 82% of unchurched say they would be at least somewhat likely to attend if invited and 25% say that they would be very likely to attend church if a friend would just take the time or make the effort to invite them! Think about that… that’s 1 in 4 of your friends who would be willing to come to church if you, not some stranger, invited them to go with you.

 What an opportunity! The sad truth, though, is that only 2% of church members invite an unchurched person each year. I mean, what are we thinking!? Do we not realize how powerful a simple invitation can be?

 Jesus knew the power of an invitation.

 One day Jesus was out walking near the Jordan River and John the Baptist saw him coming in the distance. So John stood up, nudged his two followers, and pointed to Jesus saying*, “Look, the Lamb of God!”* (John 1:35 NIV). So the two disciples got up and started chasing after Jesus. When they finally caught up to him, they asked him where he was going.

 Then Jesus said, *“Come along and see for yourself”* (John 1:39 MSG). That simple invitation changed their lives forever; they would never be the same. When you invite someone to church, or to a small group meeting, or an outreach event, or even over to your house for dinner—especially if this is someone who doesn’t know Jesus—it has the power to do the same thing; to change a person’s life forever.

 I’m going to begin preaching a series of messages telling us that we are chosen by God and that includes becoming a part of the Church, which the Bible says is the Body of Christ.

 A couple years back I preached a series on being a Contagious Christian. We learned there are several different styles or methods of outreach, one of which is very simply the Invitational Style.

 This approach doesn’t involve having an intellectual debate about the existence of God or the value of organized religion. It doesn’t even require you to outline the plan of salvation or explain the gospel message. All that’s required is that you ask one little question: “Would you like to come to church with me this Sunday?” That’s not hard, is it? We can do that. You can do that. Everyone can do that.

 In order to help you ask this question more effectively, let me first give you some insight into why most people don’t attend anymore. Everyone’s reasons for leaving or returning to church are different, but let me share some of the most common reasons people give.

**#1: TOO BUSY!**

 The number one reason people say they don’t come to church is that they are too busy. For some people, Sunday is their only day off and they want to have a day to rest. That’s not a bad thing. God commanded that we have a day of rest. God knew that we would ultimately live in this face-paced, high-tech, high-stress place we call the world. By the end of the work week most of us are brain-dead, sleep-deprived, and longing for some rest and relaxation.

 What we need to remind people of is that their spiritual batteries need recharging just as much as their physical batteries do. And the truth is—we do what’s important to us. We all have the same number of days in the week and the same number of hours in a day. Jesus said this: “*Seek first God's kingdom and what God wants. Then all your other needs will be met as well”* (Matthew 6:33 NCV).

**#2: CHURCH IS BORING**

 The second most common reason that people don’t go to church anymore is that they think it’s boring. Maybe part of the problem here is that our multi-media culture has conditioned us to require vast amounts of stimuli to maintain our attention; I don’t know, but I can sympathize. I’ve attended churches where the hymns were dull, the prayers were dry, and the preaching dreary. No one wants to sit in an uncomfortable pew and be bored to death for an hour.

 A lot of churches and Christians respond to this complaint by saying, “Well, church isn’t supposed to be entertaining!” I would say, “Really? Are you sure about that?” Jesus sure was entertaining! The Bible tells us that…

• *“the crowds were amazed at his teaching*” (Matthew 7:28)

• *“the crowds were profoundly impressed”* (Matthew 22:33 TLB)

• *“the people were spellbound by his teaching*” (Mark 11:18 NRSV)

• *“the great crowd enjoyed listening to him*” (Mark 12:37 NASB)

 Jesus was able to captivate and hold the attention of crowds as big 15,000 for hours at a time, without a worship band. If you don’t think church should be entertaining, at least we can agree that it should be interesting and enjoyable.

 Now, I don’t claim to be as dynamic or spellbinding as Jesus, but I sure hope I can capture your attention for 20 minutes or so. When our worship or preaching is dull, people don’t just think the pastor or the worship team is boring, they think Jesus is boring. He’s not!

 Going to church each week should be a joy! If you want your friends to give church a try then you need to show some enthusiasm and excitement about church. Let the people you see on Monday know what a great time you had on Sunday.

**#3: UNFRIENDLY**

 The third most common reason that people don’t attend church anymore is that they feel like church members are unfriendly and they don’t fit in. I think the most overlooked key to growing a church is—loving outsiders the way Jesus did! The first thing people notice about a church is the acceptance and friendliness (or lack thereof) of the members.

 The funny thing is—every congregation thinks that they are a warm loving bunch. But they may only be warm and loving toward each other. If we want people to feel wanted and welcome when they come here, we need to make that extra effort to make them feel wanted and welcome.

 The best time to show love to a visitor, by the way, is before they visit. Before you invite someone to church, make sure they know you actually care about them and their needs. If we don’t love people, nothing else matters. The Bible says, *“Whoever does not love, does not know God, because God is love”* (1 John 4:8 NIV).

 If you love God and you love your church, then make a concerted effort this week to invite your friends, relatives, associates, and neighbors to church with you. And let me give some advice when inviting. Before we send you out there are a few tips you should take with you.

**#1: BE SPECIFIC**

 Don’t say, “Why don’t you come to church with me sometime.” That’s too general and too vague. When you aren’t specific, it’s easy for people to be agreeable but just keep putting it off. SOMEDAY never rolls around; SUNDAY, however, comes along every week. So when you invite people to church, invite them on a specific day. This week we want you to invite them for Back to Church Sunday next week. But if they are busy that day, then say, “How about the first Sunday of October?” That gives them enough time to plan, to mark it on the calendar. Also, check our calendar of events and look for people to invite to those specific events like our Friday Family Nights. Or if there is a young couple that you’re friends with (or a family with kids), say, “Hey, our church has a really fun Children’s program on Tuesdays after school. Why don’t you bring your kids? Our adult chaperons will meet them at the school and walk them over.”

Whatever you do, be specific and intentional.

**#2: BE CONSIDERATE**

 People don’t like showing up somewhere new, feeling out of place, not knowing where they are supposed to go or what they’re supposed to do. So when you invite someone, offer to pick them up, or stop by their house on the way so they can follow you, or at the very least meet them in the parking lot. That way they see a familiar face when they arrive, they aren’t walking in all alone, you can show them were to go, and you can introduce them to people as your friend or family. It gives people a sense of security to know that you are by their side in this strange place, and have them sit with you.

**#3: BE PERSISTENT**

 You may have to extend a dozen invitations before someone says yes. That’s okay. If you pick out 4 of your unchurched friends, relatives, associates or neighbors, statistically at least one of them will accept your invitation. You may have to work on the other 3 for a while, but it will be worth it in the end. Remember the parable of the seed, the four soils, and the sower?

 Jesus said, *“Listen! A farmer went out to plant some seeds. As he scattered them across his field, some seeds fell on a footpath, and the birds came and ate them. Other seeds fell on shallow soil with underlying rock… Other seeds fell among thorns that grew up and choked out the tender plants. Still other seeds fell on fertile soil, and they produced a crop that was thirty, sixty, and even a hundred times as much as had been planted!”* (Matthew 13:3-8 NLT).

 Of the four types of soil that the farmer scattered his seed across, only one (25%) actually produced results. But still he scattered the seed everywhere he went. Why? Because the more seed he scattered, the better his chances were of getting a crop.

 Look at every invitation you extend as one seed. The more seed you spread, the more results you’ll see!

Conclusion:

 If, on average, only 2% of church members invite an unchurched person to church this year, let’s be above average! Let’s not be a statistic. One invitation, one question, can make all the difference for time and for eternity: “Will you come to church with me this Sunday?”

**Let us pray:**

Lord Jesus, You tell us in Your Gospel, *“If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.”* (John 7:37-38 NIV). You were speaking of the Holy Spirit who would be with us and give us the words we need at the right time. We come to You thirsty, and ask for your Holy Spirit to give us the courage and the words this week to invite someone back to church next Sunday. In your wonderful name we pray. Amen