

HOW TO REACH NON-BELIEVERS WHO DON'T THINK THEY NEED GOD

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A few years ago, I read a survey that made me literally sit up straight as I took notice. The number of people in Canada (my country) who profess “no religion” is now at 24%, up from 16.5% a decade earlier. That is a massive shift in a mere ten years.

As I reflect on it all, I am left with this growing realization...

People are learning to live comfortably without God.

Want to see where this might be heading? Go to Western Europe, where people have very comfortable lives and only a splinter regularly attend church or read the Bible. They just do not see their need for God.

Rather than being met with a wall of hostility, Christians are mostly being met with a wall of indifference and perceived irrelevance. I believe that means a massive shift in attitude and approach for those of us in leadership in the local church, and marketplace.

Much of the church's outreach over the last 60 years has been based on a few assumptions that are less and less true every year:

- Young adults will return to church when they have kids.
- People will turn to God when they hit a crisis.
- Most people will come back to what they left when they were young.
- When people have spiritual needs, they will look to the church to fulfill them.

Instead, here is what I see as increasingly true among unchurched people who are learning to live comfortably without God:

- Affluence (even many of our poor are affluent from a global perspective) has left people with a sense they have all they need to face life.
- People don't always turn to God in a crisis; they honestly don't think that God/church can help.
- You can only come back to something you knew; when you are on your second or third generation of 'unchurched', there is nothing to come back to for many people.
- Personalized, google-able spirituality doesn't demand the assistance of anyone or anything else.

So how do you reach a growing number of people who are learning to live comfortably without God?

1. BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

Jesus was deeply relational, and it seems he liked relationships with people outside the 'church' more than he liked hanging around people inside the 'church'.

One of the best ways to encourage people to build relationships with unchurched people is to stop running ministries in your church every night of the week. Encourage the Christians in the marketplace or church to

get involved in their kids' schools, to play sports in a community league, to get to know their neighbors. invite them over. Salt only realizes its purpose if it gets out of the box and into the food it needs to season. You cannot influence people you don't know.

2. SPEAK TO SUCCESS, NOT JUST FAILURE

In your conversation, if you are only prepared to speak to people in their moments of weakness and despair, you are going to miss a big chunk of reaching your community. If every example you share is of someone in a crisis or who has deep problems, you will never connect with people who like their lives or who have decent marriages, even without God. That kind of talk is also a bit of a person-repellant.

So, what might you say? A few ideas:

- i. **Talk about success but ask questions about its emptiness.** Most successful people I know are always on a quest for more. Success promises, but never (quite) fully delivers. Speak to that. Ask questions like "do you ever wonder if there's more?" Or "ever wonder what that gnawing desire is really all about?"
- ii. **Assume people are doing their best.** The derogatory and condescending caricatures of unchurched people by some Christians are just insulting...especially if you have unchurched people in the room. Most people are doing their best. They really are. If you start with acknowledging that and empathizing with them, they will accept your challenge at the end. Even value it.
- iii. **Respect their intelligence.** Most people have done some homework. Often quite extensive. They believe what they believe or don't believe for what they see as good reasons. When you respect them, they are more likely to respect you and your views.

3. VALUE THE GOOD YOU SEE

The *everything secular is evil* attitude of many Christian leaders is not only a bit off base biblically, it's also ineffective. Common grace is still at work in the world. If you read Acts 10, God appears to have valued people like Cornelius for his prayers and his gifts to the poor, even before his conversion.

Jesus never started a conversation with an outsider by condemning them (that's actually how he started his conversation with insiders...think about that), even if he finished it with a challenge ("go and sin no more"). Maybe that's because Jesus actually loves unbelievers.

It's going to take a lot of us rethinking our cultural assumptions as we move into this next era.

Is Your Church ... Is Your Business Ready for Future Evangelism?

Almost every Christian leader wants to grow the Kingdom by reaching more people. As culture continues to change rapidly into a post-Christian era, though, it's left many leaders feeling like they're not accomplishing their mission. For too many Christians, things aren't going as hoped.