

Preface

I checked my library. Virtually every single book I could find about church growth was written for the pastor. I had to check a couple times, scanning my shelves – I have a *lot* of bookshelves – just to be sure I hadn't missed anything.

I hadn't.

It turns out, most people in the church think it's the pastor's job to grow the church.

And they're right, ultimately. The pastor *is* responsible for seeing that the church grows. But no pastor can do that all by themselves. It takes a congregation.

So, why are all the books for growing a church written for the clergy?

I suspect it's because of that responsibility thing. But as I work with my own congregation, it became increasingly clear that the average church member didn't know what they could do to help grow their church, other than inviting someone to "come to church" with them.

And pretty much *no one* today wants to go to church.

I've seen that statistic cited over and over that about 85 percent of Americans respond that they would be willing to attend a church if a relative or close friend invited them.

So, how's that working for you?

When I've shared that statistic with church members all across the US, I see eyes rolling across the room like a tsunami making landfall. Why? Because pretty much everyone in those rooms have invited all their friends, relatives, acquaintances, neighbors, coworkers, and pretty much everyone else to come to church with them and they've all got the same results. Virtually *no one* wants to go to church ... and almost no one ever enthusiastically says "Yes!"

The flaw there, though, is in the practice of inviting people to church. Like I said, pretty much no one wants to go to church, and fewer people than ever before are actually attending worship. But that doesn't mean that our friends wouldn't be willing to accompany us to some meaningful event hosted at the church.

Did you catch the subtle nuance there? No one wants to go to church, but at least some would be willing to go to a church for some meaningful event.

We live in a culture where the word "church" is synonymous with boring, irrelevant, anachronistic, bigoted, judgmental, and pointless. It evokes visions of empty ritual, stuffy people, antique music, and either long-winded monotonic sermons or guilt inducing, fire and brimstone whooping and hollering. If that's what people think church is, is it any wonder no one wants to come?

Of course, most churches aren't like that.¹ Most churches are exceptions to the perceived rule. Most churches are loving, exciting, relevant, timely, accepting, and to-the-point. And though, your neighbors might not be interested in "coming to church" with you, they will be pleasantly surprised when they accept an invitation to attend a message series on *Chapter 2: Life After Divorce* and discover your church is filled with people looking for answers to hard questions ... just like him/her.

And so, I've written this book as a guide to help your church grow, because even though it's the pastor's job to grow the church, you pastor can't do it without your help.

¹ On the other hand, if your church *is* like that please don't use the tools in this book to invite anyone until something's changed. The last thing Christianity and the church needs is to confirm to our unchurched neighbors that they were right all along.

Introduction

I have a personal rule: the Introduction shouldn't be longer than any of the chapters in the book. So I'll keep this brief.

Really brief.

This book has 101 chapters. I know, that sounds like a lot. But since you're probably holding this book in your hands, you've probably already noticed it's a pretty thin book. That's because I've intentionally curbed my love of prose in order to write as succinctly as possible so that you can put each of these tools into practice with a minimum of fuss.

However, a couple of notes.

First, many of these tools are things you can do in literally a matter of minutes from your computer or mobile phone. As simple as these may seem to be, in our digital community these tools can be *very* powerful. Some of these digital tools can be, and should be, repeated regularly. If you're a digital calendar user, it would be helpful to set a reminder to use a particular tool again in a week or two or four.

Second, some of these tools will require some effort and probably cost you some time and money. These particular tools are almost always ways to connect with people in your community ... and these connections are the most powerful church building tools of all. Please don't just brush these off. You can't be faithful to the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19–20 if you don't have non-Christian friends.

Finally, there may be a few of these tools that are outside of your expertise and some outside of your comfort zone. Again, don't blow them off. You never know what you can accomplish if you're willing to try ... and for those outside your comfort zone, who knows – perhaps God is challenging you to step outside of your safe zone in order to change your world and someone else's world as well.

1. The Joy of Mondays

It's Monday morning, the day after the Big Game ... that is, your church's weekly worship service. As you adjust your desk chair, as you open up your tool chest, or as you scan your agenda before making that first sales call, someone walking by will invariably ask, "What did you do this weekend?"

And *that's* a loaded question ... that is, it's loaded with opportunity to help grow your church.

Instead of telling them about the trip to the waterpark, the great deal you got at the mattress store, or your fourteen-hour *Planet of the Apes* binge, this is your Golden Ticket to give your church some really good press.

But whatever you do, don't just say, "*I went to church.*" If you do, you've probably fumbled the ball and won't be able to recover. Instead of interest in your experience, those four little words are likely to draw one of the most common responses heard in the Americas today, "Huh? Church? Why?!?"

On the other hand, you may honestly not remember many of the highlights from worship yesterday. Statistics show that most church members can't remember the gist of the sermon by Monday morning, so don't feel bad – you're in good company. To alleviate that issue, you can be an all-star Monday Morning Quarterback by taking just five minutes or less to prepare on Sunday.

- **Use Your Bulletin.** If your church uses a bulletin or worship program, use it to jot down a couple notes. This'll be easy if you're a natural note-taker, but even if you've never taken a sermon note in your life, it's super easy to prepare for Monday morning. During worship, listen for two things. (1) Some word of testimony or a story that's inspiring; and (2) Something from the sermon that caught your attention or was helpful. When you hear either of these, write down the words, phrases, or thoughts on the bulletin.
- **Hang Onto Your Bulletin Digitally.** I know from experience that most church members either leave their worship bulletin sitting in the pew at the end of worship, or else they recycle it on their way out. However, before you walk away, use your smartphone to snap a picture of that meaningful thought you jotted down.
- **Review Your Note.** Finally, either last thing at night or first thing Monday morning, take a peek at the photo. This will help lock the key thought in your mind so that when the time comes, you can deftly complete the hand-off.

Okay, the moment's come. Your coworker, your boss, or the concierge has asked that fateful question ...

"So, what did you do this weekend? Anything fun?"

And because you've reviewed the play, you're ready to jump in the game. I'll wrap this up with some ideas for how to share what inspired you at this weekend's worship.

“I learned how to deal with my meddling mother. My pastor walked us through Moses’ three steps for getting free from manipulation.”

“We had coffee and donuts with some of our friends and talked about how hard it is to forgive someone when they slam you on social media. It’s a conversation that was sparked by something I heard in one of the Sunday worship songs.”

“I got to hear about a friend’s trip to Ethiopia. She went with a group from our church and built a well in a village that didn’t have fresh water. I’m thinking about going sometime.”

“I learned about a city-wide initiative to curb violence and how our church is taking an active part in it. In fact, I signed up for one of the forums the city council is having.”

Remember, the goal of your words is to elicit questions, to spark an extended conversation, and most importantly, to build interest in learning more about your church.

2. Double-Down with Your Church Bulletin

1 Peter 3:15

Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.

When it comes to evangelism, this is my polar-star verse. It tells me everything I need to know about the basics of evangelism. Peter made three assumptions in this verse.

1. That you have a reason to hope. In other words, you're a person of faith.
2. You can articulate the reason for your hope.

And here's the coup de grass for me:

3. People are asking you for that reason.

The problem is that as Christians and church members, we don't often get "asked" about our "hope." Therefore, anything we can do to arouse curiosity about our faith walk and about our church makes it easier for us to share. With that in mind, here is one idea you can use to try and elicit faith and church conversations (and you'll read of others as you peruse this book).

Most churches still use some sort of a handout at their worship services. Some have a full-blown bulletin. Others provide a four-color worship program. And still others use a newsletter/announcement flyer. Whatever it is your church uses, don't just drop it into the recycling bin as you leave worship this weekend. Instead of recycling it, reuse it as a conversation starter at work (BTW, you can do this even in those workplaces where you're not allowed to initiate faith-based conversations ... because you're not initiating the conversation!).

Here's how to double-down with your church bulletin. On Monday, take your worship publication with you to work. If it's a color publication, all the better. Then, depending on your workspace, "display" it as prominently, but tastefully, as possible. The goal is to elicit a question about the publication, so you will want to experiment over a couple of weeks about which "side" of the bulletin faces your audience.

Some churches use a preprinted bulletin cover that feature attractive color images. Depending on the image, these may evoke a comment such as "What a beautiful flower arrangement!" Rather than just saying "Thank you," use the opportunity to mention your church attendance with something like, "Thanks. The church I go to is into things that are beautiful and I thought I'd share it here at work."

Other churches have a page filled with upcoming events that you might choose to display. These might draw a question such as, "What's a mission trip?" or "Your church is doing a Bible study on contradictions in the Bible?" Again, these are wide open doors for conversations.

And that's the point ... getting people to ask. Raising your coworker's curiosity. Because when your friends ask, you get the opportunity to share the hope that you have.

3. Don't Invite Anyone to Church

If you're like most long-time church members, you've managed to invite quite a few people to come to church. And if you're like most long-time church members, most of those invites have been politely turned down with one excuse or another.

"Sunday's my only day to sleep in."

"The kid's soccer practice is on Sunday mornings."

"Sunday's my golf day."

"I just don't go to church anymore."

Sadly, the church doesn't have a great reputation in our culture today. If you ask unchurched people why they don't want to go to church, you'll hear words like *boring* and *irrelevant*. With that kind of notoriety, it's no wonder our invitations fall on deaf ears.

On the other hand, if you somehow could remove the twin stigmas of boring and irrelevant, you'd likely have better luck in getting a friend to "come to church" with you. And believe it or not, there's an effective way to turn around the church's reputation.

Most pastors preach sermon series on hot topics these days; three to six messages on important themes. To help grow your church, the next time your pastor announces an upcoming series, take a few minutes to read up about it so you understand what's coming up (if the pastor hasn't provided something in writing about the series, ask her/him to get you some basic details). Then spend a few minutes in prayer and ask the Spirit to suggest people in your sphere of influence that would be moved, touched, or inspired by the topic.

For instance, if the upcoming series is on difficult questions in the Bible, you might remember that a coworker has expressed her skepticism about scripture and might find the topic interesting. If the series is on healing inner hurts, you may know someone who's recently experienced a broken relationship who would find the series comforting.

Once you've made a list of those you believe would find the series helpful or interesting, then use whatever tools the church provides to invite those on your list. If the church provides invitation cards, then get a couple to hand out. If the church has an online graphic for the series, copy it and use it to send an email invite. Or if the church has created a social media event, send an invitation on to those on your list.

Of course, the most effective way to invite a friend to attend an upcoming series is to invite them in person.

"Terry, I know you're still reeling from your mom's passing. Over the next three weeks my pastor is talking about how to build on grief to make a brighter tomorrow. I was hoping you'd join me for breakfast on Sunday and afterwards we could hear what she has to say about life after grief. "

“Kelly, you’ve said you think the Bible is full of contradictions. My pastor’s created a message series on five of those contradictions. I thought you might like to join me to hear what he has to say ... and then you and I could get coffee and talk about them. Can I pick you up Sunday at 10:30?”

When you invite your friends to something “at church” they’d be interested in, you automatically get past the boring and irrelevant objections.

4. The Business of Church

One of the realities of the church today is that the pastor is the “face” of the church in the public eye. It’s not the way it’s supposed to be, but that’s the way it works in real life. And so, most pastors I know carry business cards wherever they go because, as representatives of the church, they are ostensibly always networking. You just never know who you’re going to meet or where a random conversation may lead and sharing your business card leaves open the opportunity for further conversation.

If the pastor is the *only* face of your church, then your church isn’t going to have much reach. A pastor can only do so much (hence the need for this book!). The reality is, *you’re* the face of your church to your spheres of influence within the community. Like your pastor, wherever you go you have the opportunity to network and connect with pretty much everyone you meet. Therefore, it’s important that you have some sort of church business card you can hand to someone to invite further conversation and to communicate information about your church to them.

You don’t have to be independently wealthy, a computer whiz, or an artist to design and print an economical and effective church business card. Online companies like PaperDirect.com and VistaPrint.com provide attractive templates that you can easily modify to suit your personality, to give others the basic information about your church, as well as to make a lasting impression. (And don’t overlook your local print shop – shopping local is a great way to expand your network as well as to support your neighbors!)

Below is an image from VistaPrint of a card I put together in less than ten minutes. Notice what’s on the card:

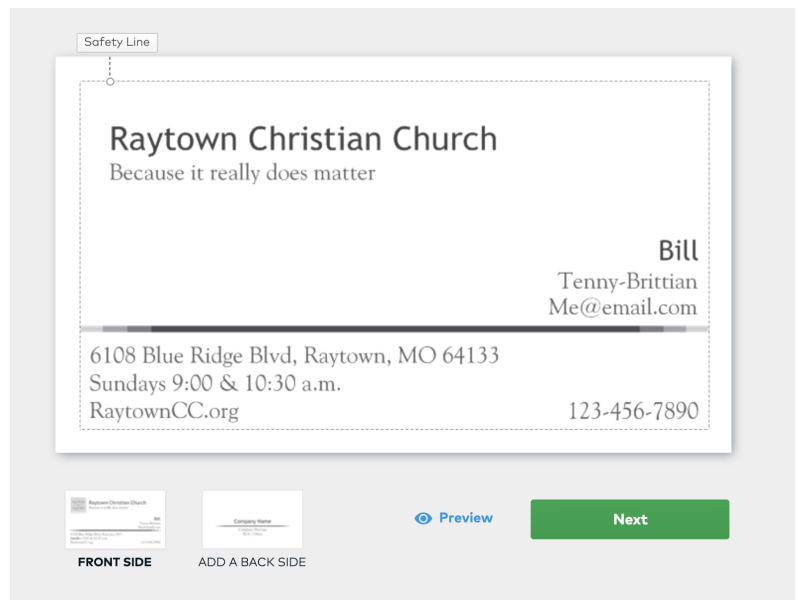
Most prominent is the name of the church.

I added a bit of a cryptic slogan in order to encourage conversation (“Because *what* matters?!”).

I included my name and my email address. However, you may have noticed that I didn’t put my “position” in the church. I’ve seen cards that say “Member,” but I think it looks strained (and a bit strange as well).

I included the address of the church and the day/times of the worship services.

I included the church’s phone number and the website’s URL. It’s been suggested that upwards of 95 percent of your visitors will check out the church’s website *before* they decide whether or not to come to worship, hence it’s very important to include the church’s URL.



One note ... I don't recommend putting anything on the back of the card for a couple of reasons. First, it jacks up the cost of the card. But second, if the back's blank it leaves you space for leaving a note, adding your cell phone number, or giving directions.

Finally, I recommend getting gloss finish – it may or may not cost extra, depending on the design you choose. I've found that the ink on the matt finish is pretty easily rubbed off, making the card a lot less attractive. I haven't had that problem on glossy cards.

At the time of this writing, I could order the above cards in gloss for \$20 for 500 cards. That's a lot of cards for a very inexpensive cost. Although your church office might be able to make your cards and print them on cardstock, the fact is your office staff has plenty enough on their plates. Do them, and your church, a favor by getting them yourself.

You may be wondering how having cards will grow your church. The answer is that if you carry them and hand them out to people you meet, you'll have had an opportunity to share at least something about your congregation to a potential visitor. And besides, throughout this book you're going to read a number of tools that are seriously enhanced by leaving your church business card.