

Easter Is Starting Point for Evangelism, Not Finish Line

Easter is one of the two biggest weekends for most churches in terms of attendance. I see this as a great opportunity for evangelism to begin and for a relationship to start between your church and all of the visitors who come that Sunday. You should do everything you can to leverage Easter weekend for growth.

At the same time, it's important not to "put all your eggs in the Easter basket." What I mean is, Easter is a great starting point for evangelism, but it's not the finish line, at least not for a purpose-driven church. In our culture, it usually takes multiple exposures to the gospel for someone to make a decision to follow Jesus. Let me explain.

Give People More Than One Week

Many churches offer a come-forward invitation—which, by the way, I used to do myself, Billy Graham-style, when I would preach evangelistic crusades. There's absolutely nothing wrong with altar calls. But often the emphasis is on making a decision in the moment, and often there is a lot of pressure.

If we're not careful, it becomes a battle of the wills, and if we unintentionally fall into the trap of emotionally coercing people into making an instant decision, it becomes a battle of wills between the pastor and the person in the congregation. This often hardens hearts rather than softening them. I say if the fruit is ripe, you don't have to yank it.

The fact is, many people come to church for many different motives. We believe if they'll just keep coming, it is inevitable that the Holy Spirit is going to speak to them. It's just a matter of time. God's Word has life-giving power and does not return void. When we share it faithfully, it

brings the spiritually dead back to life. Don't be in a hurry to force people to make a premature decision. Let Easter Sunday be the start of a longer-term relationship.

You probably didn't receive Christ the first time you heard the Good News. I didn't either. I had to think about it. So while we need to present the gospel clearly and always give people an opportunity to respond by receiving Christ, we don't have to apply more pressure than the Holy Spirit does.

We believe that everyone must make a decision about what they will do with Jesus and that only those who decide to receive Him will spend eternity in heaven. But we're interested in far more than just the initial decision. We're interested in making disciples. People who make decisions under pressure tend to drop away quicker once the pressure's off, but decisions that are made after people have seriously considered the implications of following Christ are the decisions that last.

Give People More Than One Way

We believe that there are many, many ways to reach people for Christ. And the more hooks you use, the more fish you're going to catch. Obviously, the primary weekend worship service will be the most common way that people are exposed to the gospel, but many people come to know Jesus through a small group, a recovery ministry, an outreach event or in a lay counseling situation. So think beyond the Easter invitation to how evangelistic all of your ministries are.

Give People Room to Grow

We believe that in sharing the Good News, you begin where people are, not where you want them to be. We don't expect people to act like believers until they are believers. The Bible does not say, "Clean up your act and then come to Christ." It says, "Come to Christ and He'll help you clean up your act."

There are people who come to church with all kinds of bad habits, but the church is not a hotel for saints. It's a hospital for sinners. It's not where we walk around in dress clothes and parade our piety. What we do is accept people where they are.

And by the way, there's a difference between acceptance and approval. You can accept a person without approving of their sin. Jesus did. He accepted the woman caught in the act of adultery, but He didn't approve of her sin. He accepted without approving. You love the person without approving of the lifestyle.

Easter is a big weekend. I'm praying for pastors and churches all over the world as we celebrate the resurrection of Christ, that God would help churches to meet and reach new people as never before. But I also pray that churches focus on being healthy for the long haul so that people find Christ week after week.

Rick Warren is the founding pastor of Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, Calif., one of America's largest and most influential churches. Rick is author of the New York Times best-seller *The Purpose Driven Life*. His book *The Purpose Driven Church* was named one of the 100 Christian books that changed the 20th century. He is also founder of , a global Internet community for pastors.

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