

Snubbed by Christian TV

✖ I got involved in Christian TELEVISION more than 30 years ago for one reason: It could reach huge numbers of people with the gospel—people who would never set foot in a church. I wasn't particularly interested in changing the culture, promoting a political agenda or entertaining while promoting Christian morals. It was a heart for evangelism that caused me to dedicate my career to helping dozens of "broadcast ministries."

Today I feel betrayed by the "industry." I have to be honest and call it what it is. With the billions of dollars we've raised, it is indeed an industry.

Several months ago, I set out to test the responsiveness of a few dozen of these ministries. I selected small ones, giant ones, evangelicals and charismatics across all the major Christian networks. Many I knew personally; some I had worked with; some I had never heard of.

I began the test, confident that if I asked any of them about the primary reason they were on television, they would say without hesitation, "to win the lost."

I drafted a very simple letter under an assumed name. I thanked the ministry for being there and asked how I could accept Jesus into my heart. I enclosed \$20 and listed my address in a bit

of an
unconventional way.

After 45 days, I had heard from more than 95 percent of them. Sadly, less than 25 percent addressed my question about salvation in a direct, easy-to-understand way. Think about that. If we are really about evangelism, how can this be?

The most impressive response was a simple letter from a small ministry that walked me down the road to salvation. It was personal, direct and spoke to me from the heart. A few others sent short books on leading a person to salvation that presented the process in a more formal manner.

Another 20 percent sent packages that contained books or a handfuls of books and DVDs, but none gave me a direct answer to the most important question a person can ask. One up-and-coming TV preacher sent me a large package of stuff that cost \$ to mail! But there was no simple explanation of the good news.

The rest of the ministries (the majority) didn't respond to my question. I was thanked for my gift and put on a direct-mail list. I received magazines, newsletters and more stuff, but no answers.

By the end of the test, I was shocked, sad and angry. The truth is, I think all the leaders of these ministries would be horrified to know what had happened.

They are simply too busy to know this is the way correspondence is handled. They have messages to write, funds to raise and TV programs to produce. They trust their managers to know their heart's desire and make it happen.

I think they would be horrified to know what else I learned: More than 80 percent of the ministries either failed to thank the new donor—who cost them from \$70 to \$300 to acquire—within a month's time, or they didn't have a system in place to detect and fix a minor address issue that is costing them money every day.

Is *yours* one of these TV ministries? If I could face you, this would be my challenge:

Today, ask the senior person in your ministry to tell you what happens when someone inquires in a letter about the way to salvation.

But don't stop there. Have your secretary test the system on the side to see how it works. Know what actually happens.

I will not share in public all I learned. But the leaders should be grateful that I am not a reporter for *20/20* or *60 Minutes*. My heart is not to make anyone angry or get anyone into trouble. It is to help fix this *now*.

Mary Hutchinson is a donor-development professional and runs her own company, Inspired Direct (), in Nashua, New Hampshire.