

Pastor of One of America's Fastest-Growing Churches Says We Must Help the World 'Swipe Right' for Jesus

In this season of bad news about declining church attendance and the younger generations walking away from their faith, the Holy Spirit is blowing in a positive word about a vibrant, growing church in the greater Orlando, Florida, area. Assemblies of God Pastor J.J. Vasquez of Journey Church in Winter Park, Florida, says despite the negative reports, God is on the move in His church in powerful ways—and it all has to do with making the real Jesus accessible to all.

"God's been really, really gracious," Vasquez, who left a teaching position at Southeastern University in Lakeland, Florida, to plant the church, says in a recent podcast interview. "In *Outreach* magazine, we were identified as one of the top 10 fastest-growing churches in the U.S. Last year, after four years of ministry, we recorded our 1,000th salvation in four years. And those aren't just raised hands that our ushers were counting in the back. Those were contact cards filled out, names, email addresses ... we've seen 600 people make decisions for Jesus just this year."

Vasquez, 35, adds that many of those who have found salvation through Journey Church are young people. "And I think that is what is making it so exciting," he says. "For me, I think that there is a reputation that Millennials have, and even Gen Zers, about being disinterested in religion. But I think, if anything good has come out from the pandemic, or at least exposed anything from the pandemic, it's that when everything gets stripped away, you no longer have sports, and you no longer have school, you no longer have health, and you no

longer have perceived stability, and life gets stripped down to its bare bones, you're forced to look up. You're forced to realize that there has to be something bigger in this world. And so people have been interested in God.

"I hear the stories," he says. "I see all the reports. But it's not what I see in our church. I see God doing something special."

Journey Church's mission statement says, "We exist to make Jesus accessible to anyone," Vasquez says. "And the word 'accessible' is really what we pinned our ministry strategy on. We believe that Jesus is beautiful, absolutely beautiful. And if you took the time to meet Him, He would steal your heart; you would fall in love with Him. And He would fill you with passion and hope and life change.

"But so many people don't get to go on a date with him, don't get to meet him—to use the language of Millennials—because they don't swipe right," he adds. "So I'm sure you're familiar with the dating apps today. And if you look at the profile and if the profile is attractive, then you swipe on, and that swipe is a 'Hey, I want to get to know more.' So we feel like our job at Journey Church is to not show you the fake Jesus, but the real one. Not the one that the media presents, not the one that you learned about at your liberal college or university, but the actual real Jesus. If you just get to see Him, you will fall in love with Him."

But Vazquez is not preaching a feel-good, soft-sell brand of Christianity. "I think we have to not succumb to culture," he says. "But I do think we have to learn the language of culture. And I think Paul was really good with that. Paul never stopped abiding to truth. And he spoke truth even when truth wasn't popular. But because of the unique way that he grew up, he was able to be Roman to the Romans, he was able to be Jews to the Jews, Pharisee to the Pharisees. And he knew enough of the Gentile world that he could write a book like

Colossians, which is full of Phoenicians and Scythians and all of these people from different nations. He just was able to speak the language.

“And so if we look at our culture as a nation, then we would understand that our culture speaks a certain language,” Vazquez says. “And if you can just use their language, I think that Jesus wins.”

For much more from Pastor J.J. Vasquez about reaching the generations for Christ and how God is powerfully at work in Journey Church, listen to the entire episode of the *Strang Report* at this link, and subscribe to the Strang Report on Apple Podcasts or your favorite podcast platform.

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