The Unchurched: More Receptive than we Realize

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Methodology

- A demographically balanced online panel was used for interviewing American adults
- The study was sponsored by the Billy Graham Center for Evangelism at Wheaton College
- The survey was conducted May 23 – June 1, 2016
- Slight weights were used to balance gender, age, ethnicity, income, region, and religion
- The sample was screened to only include those who have not attended a religious service in the past six months except for a holiday or special event such as a wedding or funeral
- The completed sample is 2,000 surveys
- The sample provides 95% confidence that the sampling error from the online panel does not exceed ±2.7% (This margin of error accounts for the effect of weighting)
- Margins of error are higher in sub-groups

Our Problem:

We have a false narrative of the unchurched that deactivates witness.
Manifestations:

- Our narrative of the unchurched is deficient, defeatist, and demotivating.
- We’ve stopped sharing our faith, inviting people & expecting God to renew the church in our time.

But 10% of churches are growing through conversion growth.

Why?
They have a different narrative.
Unchurched people, including millennials are more receptive than we realize.

How do unchurched view the church?
- Some say that unchurched people think the church is harmful to society.
- The reality is that 40% of the unchurched think the church is beneficial to society.
- Only 6% think the church is harmful to society. The vocal minority has convinced us that the opposition is much stronger than it is!

There is a 1.5% persecution factor in our relational sharing!

Responses to Faith of Christian Friends
- 30% Admire faith
- 20% Friends talk about faith too much
- 1.5% Give Christian friends a hard time
Unchurched people are receptive to spiritual conversations and invitations to church.

If a friend of mine really values their faith, I don't mind them talking about it. 76% agree!

How effective are invitations to attend a church? 50% of the unchurched would respond positively to an invite from a friend!
Unchurched people welcome diverse approaches from the Church.

If someone you knew invited you to the following activities sponsored by a local Christian church, how likely would you be to attend?

- **WORSHIP SERVICE**
  - Likely to attend: 34%
  - Unlikely to attend: 66%

- **SMALL GROUP FOR PEOPLE CURIOUS ABOUT GOD**
  - Likely to attend: 26%
  - Unlikely to attend: 74%

- **AN EVENT TO MAKE THE NEIGHBORHOOD SAFER**
  - Likely to attend: 51%
  - Unlikely to attend: 49%

- **COMMUNITY SERVICE PROJECT**
  - Likely to attend: 46%
  - Unlikely to attend: 54%

- **SPORTS OR EXERCISE PROGRAM**
  - Likely to attend: 45%
  - Unlikely to attend: 55%

The worship service is STILL the first place the unchurched are most likely to visit!
One characteristic of the unchurched is that many have some significant background with the church, but are not interested in returning. We had them once and now we have lost them.

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Have you ever regularly attended a Christian church?

- Yes, as a child: 62%
- Yes, as a teen: 33%
- Yes, as an adult: 23%
- No: 25%

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Many unchurched have a church background that engendered distrust. The top three reasons they stopped attending:

- They lost trust, especially through experiences with a church or a Christian: 35%
- They lost interest: 30%
- Their life circumstances changed: 25%
Unchurched people EXPECT to return to church in high numbers!

How likely are you to attend church regularly sometime in the future?
33% or 50 million think they WILL! These are the 50 million Receptive!

What about millennials?
39% of millennials say they will likely return to church!!
Let’s adopt a new narrative and actively engage in bolder, more intentional, and more expectant witness.

We need an evangelism revolution based on an accurate view of how receptive the unchurched are to us, the gospel, and the church!

The greatest challenge we face to the advance of the gospel is not the culture but US- the church!