

Why Faith Beginners Don't Stick to The Church?

And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the new wine will burst the skins and it will be spilled, and the skins will be destroyed. But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins. Luke 5:37-38

The term “**faith beginner**” refers to either an unsaved person or a newly converted disciple.

Evangelistic growth is all about gathering faith beginners in order to win and then disciple them. It is quite different from the way the majority of churches grow today. Most attract Christians who are looking for something different, deeper or closer to home.

Evangelistic growth starts with a different target and uses VERY different methods.

As a sequential church planter, I have repeatedly started new evangelistic growth churches and ministries. These bodies of Christ often grew by adding 50%-80% faith beginners.

Incorporating precious faith beginners is a vital church growth task.

Pastors often say this about faith beginners: “*They come once, but they rarely come back.*” Why is this? We will look at three factors that shed some light. The Ratio Factor, the Hospitality Factor and the Responsibility Factor.

Ratio Factor

When I was a three-month-old Christian, God showed me the importance of ratios. I went back to my home town of Wellington, Ohio and started sharing Jesus with high school and college-age students. Some responded and I started a Bible study in the home of one of those faith beginners.

Within a few weeks the group had outgrown the living room, so we multiplied to a second night. By the end of the summer we had about 30 attending weekly and had baptized nine. It was an exciting summer to say the least!

One reason for this speed was that many of the faith beginners who came once kept coming over and over. Why? It was not my great, in-depth teaching or engaging personality. I was completely inexperienced, and pretty rough around the edges. I had not even been to a Bible study before, let alone taught one!

I believe they came back because of the gracious working of God and because they felt comfortable coming to a meeting made up of mainly faith beginners. Actually, they were all new to the faith, even I was a new believer.

For rapid evangelistic growth, the ratios must favor faith beginners. Here is a largely ignored principle:

Faith beginners do not feel as comfortable learning in groups where everyone is way ahead of them.

It is probably an ego factor. They do not want to be seen as spiritually ignorant. It's the same reason we don't put a first grader in the same class as a twelfth grader. Plus what and how they are taught differs.

In some of our new churches comprised of mainly faith beginners, we have had comments like:

"I love this church because nobody else knows anything about the Bible either."

"I love this church because nobody knows anybody else."

Some have criticized me for having so many spiritually immature people in our church plants, but I think that's a great problem to have! It means you are actually reaching the people you set out to reach.

Starting with a group of spiritual children is healthy as long as they continue to grow towards spiritual maturity.

What if your current group is already filled with mainly veteran church goers?

You have a few choices:

1. Give up on evangelistic growth and focus on discipling Christians.
2. Try to significantly overwhelm the group with a flood of faith beginners all at once. This could work, but is extremely hard to do. That's why I recommend the third option.
3. Discover, develop and deploy an evangelistic minded starter.

Encourage the leader to gather a very small team and send them out to start a new group. Equip them to use evangelistic growth principles. In **another article**, **Understanding Why Evangelistic Growth Has Been So Slow**, we discuss some of these principles.

In short, do a flurry of evangelism and invite many unchurched people to the *first* meeting. The goal is to start with a big bang and overwhelm the team with faith beginners.

You are creating a **funnel ministry** not a pipe ministry. A pipe ministry puts all its energies into discipling a few, in hopes they will all become multipliers. Good luck with that.

A funnel ministry sifts through many people at the top of the funnel in order to discover a few at the bottom of the funnel who will respond with full commitments to following Christ. This was characterized by the earthly ministry of Jesus.

It takes many to find a few!

In essence the ratio factor is about crafting a new wineskin. New wineskins are religious structures designed for new wine. New groups and new churches retain faith beginners better than older more established groups.

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Don't spill the wine.

Hospitality Factor

The word "hospitality" in the Bible literally means "loving strangers."

For years, in between planting churches, I have worked as a church growth consultant. One thing I do is visit churches like a secret shopper. I go to their Sunday services, but do not take initiative to speak to anyone.

I simply make myself available to see how I will be treated. Before and after the service I go to the refreshment table just to hang around. I stand around right in the middle of where the church people are mingling as I sip my coffee for 10+ minutes.

Can you guess what happens? In 8 out of 10 cases I am almost totally ignored by the regular attendees. No one talks to me apart from the official greeters and maybe a staff member.

If I didn't have an undercover purpose for doing this I would never put myself through so much pain. A few minutes of being ignored feels like hours.

Often, I get with the pastor for lunch afterwards to debrief my experience. I ask them what is the strongest thing about their church. They often say, "we are noted for being such a friendly church."

Then I tell them about my experience. Ouch. They can hardly believe it. Typically, excuses are made about how those who usually talk to visitors missed church that day.

I am not just talking about mega churches. I am also talking about churches of 50-150 people and even new church plants! The smaller the church, the bigger the problem of ignoring guests is. This issue must be solved.

Don't get me wrong, these members are not mean people. They are not rude. Sometimes they even nod at me as they walk by. They are just so focused on talking with their friends that it does not occur to them to pay attention to unattended guests.

Maybe they have not been equipped to welcome visitors, or they just forget to do so. Maybe guests at this church are extremely rare. Whatever the reason, being ignored does not make most guests want to come back.

This is just common sense, isn't it? Unfortunately, common sense gets less and less common in our churches.

In brand new churches, we encourage those who have been a couple of times to consider themselves regulars. We teach them to do unto others what they wished others would have done for them.

We use a couple of simple tools. One is the **5-minute rule**. During the first five minutes after the service we ask regulars to consider interacting with someone they do not yet know well. We don't police this rule, but it does remind members to look out for the interests of others.

Also, we use **nametags** in nearly all of our meetings. These are not traditional for most churches, but if used properly they work wonders. They remove so many barriers, especially for second time guests. Most people are terrible at remembering names, and the nametag bails them out.

There is one more often overlooked factor that keeps newcomers coming back.

The Responsibility Factor

Healthy people want to feel like they are contributing to the welfare of a group they are joining. They want to do something to earn their acceptance into the group.

In our third church plant, a 30-year old unchurched, unsaved man responded to one of our invites and came to Sunday service. After the service he saw several men cheerfully taking down chairs and putting things away. He asked if he could help. The team leader said sure, and Ralph pitched in, and had a good time with the crew.

The leader thanked him for helping and Ralph asked if he could help next week. The leader said that would be great, and Ralph became a regular part of the team. In a couple of weeks, he committed his life to Christ and later became a leader in the new church.

Unfortunately, sometimes churches treat adult faith beginners more like children than valuable potential contributors. I have seen first time guests offer to bring refreshments and refreshment team leaders tell them. *“Oh no, you do not need to do that. We will take care of everything, you just come back and enjoy the service.”*

Big mistake. Good intention, but bad for retention.

One of the reasons faith beginners come back to church regularly is that they have a responsibility. If they have a task that others are depending on them to do, they are more likely to prioritize coming.

We never pressure people to serve, but encourage it publicly and if they express interest we certainly do not turn them down.

A very helpful tool is a **connection card**. We give one out to everyone every week. Among other things, the card has a box to check that says: **Willing to help as needed**.

If anyone checks the box, we contact them that week. They are told about potential entry level responsibilities and are asked if they want to try out a role on a team.

In one new church plant, we had 100 out of 150 regular attending adults in serving positions within 6 months of our launch. 75% of these were faith beginners from the ranks of the unchurched.

Quickly given out, small places of service helps turn attenders into contributors and is one of the reasons some of our new churches grew rapidly.

Summary

Faith beginners prefer learning with other faith beginners.

Many faith beginners come to church because they want to make supportive friends. Ignoring them is a foolish, self-defeating strategy.

Some faith beginners are willing to serve. Encourage this. It is good for them now and eternally. It is also good for the growth of the church.

Apply these three factors wisely and I believe you will retain many more of the faith beginners who visit. Plus, they might be so excited about the church they will bring their unsaved friends when they come back.

- Dr. John Worcester, March 2021