

**UPDATED
AND
EXPANDED:**



**THE NEW
ASSIMILATION
SEMINAR **TRANSCRIPT****

**TURNING FIRST-TIME GUESTS INTO
FULLY-COMMITTED MEMBERS**

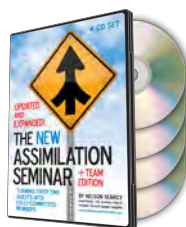
BY NELSON SEARCY



MEET NELSON SEARCY

Nelson Searcy is an experienced church planter, coach and church growth strategist, consulting with churches around the world, including many of the largest and fastest-growing ones. He's also the Founding and Lead Pastor of The Journey Church in New York City. Started in 2002, this groundbreaking church sees the majority of its growth coming from new believers and currently meets in locations in Manhattan, Queens and Staten Island, as well as San Francisco and Boca Raton, FL. Nelson is the recipient of the prestigious 2013 Donald A. McGavran Award for Outstanding Leadership in Great Commission Research. He's the author of over 75 church growth resources and 15 books, including *The Renegade Pastor: Abandoning Average in Your Life and Ministry*. He's trained more than 50,000 church leaders as founder of Church Leader Insights and the Renegade Pastors Network, which is designed to help pastors abandon average and strive for God's best in their personal lives and ministry. For more accelerated growth, pastors also participate in Nelson's Senior Pastor and Advanced Coaching Networks. His continued mission is to help church leaders around the world cooperate with God in creating healthy, thriving churches.

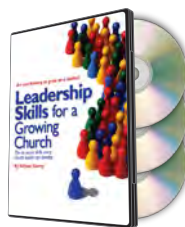
THE EIGHT SYSTEMS OF THE CHURCH:



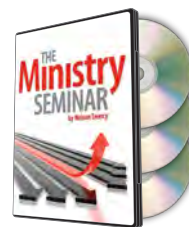
Assimilation



Evangelism



Leadership



Ministry



Small Groups



Stewardship



Strategy



Worship Planning

Books by Nelson Searcy:



UPDATED AND EXPANDED:

**THE NEW
ASSIMILATION
SEMINAR**



**THE POWER OF
ASSIMILATION**

Nelson Searcy: Hello everyone, and welcome everyone to the assimilation seminar. I'm Nelson Searcy, and I'll be your host as we work through how to move someone from first time guest all the way to fully engaged member. Really excited that you're a part of this completely revised, updated, and expanded assimilation seminar. We're going to have a lot of fun together, but we're also going to do some serious work together, because nothing can have a bigger impact on your church than working on, improving, enhancing your assimilation system.

As we go through this, let me just give you one reminder. Along with this seminar, you also have a set of notes. You'll want to find the listener's guide. Make sure you have that printed out, and every person on your team has a copy. Along the way, I'll give you some fill-in-the-blank notes that you can use to get the most out of our time together today.

I just have to tell you, I love the assimilation seminar. I love the assimilation system. For just a moment, what I'd like to do is remind you of the power of assimilation. By making some little tweaks to your assimilation system, you can have some great impact. In other words, little tweaks can bring about big peaks. Let me give you an example of this, using the average church in America.

The average church has about 200 people in attendance, and they have about four first time guests a week. If you can picture that in your mind— maybe that's your church, maybe your church is smaller, maybe it's much, much larger—but, just think about a church of 200 that has four first time guests a week. Now, when it comes to assimilation, the average church in America only keeps one out of every 20 people.

They have four per week, 20 over the course of a month. The average church only gets one of those to come back, so one out of 20 is their assimilation ratio. That means the average church only retains ten first time guests a year. Even though they have four per week, they only have a net gain of ten per year. Now imagine that same church going to work on their assimilation system. They implement the principles and techniques we're going to talk about in this seminar.

They cut their assimilation in half, or improve it by 100 percent. Now, instead of keeping one out of every 20 people, they keep one out of every 10 people. Same church, average attendance, 200. Total first time guests a week, four, but this time their assimilation rate is one out of 10. This means their growth over a year is no longer 10 people, instead the church grows by 20 people.

This is a net increase of twice as many first time guests. 20 versus 10 first time guests. This is a small analogy, but I want you to see that by making small changes to your assimilation rate, you can have a big increase. Imagine what your church would look like if you could keep one more first time guest a month. That's a net increase of 12 people a year.

What if you could keep one more first time guest a week? That is a net increase of 52 people per year. You see, nothing really impacts the growth of your church more than assimilation. Little changes can have a big impact.

In fact, at The Journey church, we keep about one first time guest for every three that walks through the door. It's actually a little better than that. In fact, we keep about 40 percent of the first time guests.

We have a system that we know if we get new people through the door, more than likely they're going to show up and come back. This can lead to some amazing growth inside of your church. It can also lead to amazing life change. We know if we don't get first time guests to come back, they're not going to hear about Jesus, not going to grow as his follower, never going to become that fully developing follower of Jesus that

God wants us all to be.

What you're working on can have a big impact in your church. I want to thank you for giving your attention and focus to this important area called assimilation. I'm sure a lot of you know me from coaching or my books or other seminars. What you may not know is some of the early story of The Journey Church. Let me take you back to when we first began our church, many years ago.

We began in a comedy club on the upper west side of Manhattan. Before we officially launched our church on Easter Sunday, we did a series of monthly services leading up to our launch. If you're familiar with my church planning strategy and system for how to launch a church, you know you move to an area and do these monthly services.

I moved to New York City with no money, no members, no meeting location. But I quickly secured a place, we did monthly services. September, October, November, December, January, and February. Then we eventually had a grand opening, launched our church on Easter Sunday, in March on this particular year. On that Sunday, we had 110 people show up. I was ecstatic. 110 people, I'd just moved there a few months prior to that.

I thought this was a great number to start with. It was the next Sunday I learned my first principle of church growth as a new church planter in New York City. I learned that everybody who comes on Easter Sunday does not come back the Sunday after. The good news is we had 55 people come back. I felt, that's not bad, I kept half.

Then, unfortunately, through my dynamic leadership and charismatic preaching, I grew the church down to 35 over the next three months. Here we are in September, and I'm having a crisis. I'm having a crisis of belief. I begin to have this conversation with God, and maybe when you've gone through crisis you've had a similar conversation with God.

I'm asking God, "Why is this happening?" I'm telling God, at the rate we're declining, we're going to be out of business, if you will, by Christmas. I'd moved here to start this new church, but now things were not going the way I thought they should go. In fact, I began to sort of get mad at God, and I began to tell God all of the things that I'd done for him. I was talking to God in my prayer time, telling God I moved across country, prior to living in New York City, I'd lived in Southern California, and left a job at a very large church as an associate pastor.

I told God how I'd left that church and moved across country. I told God how I'd sold my house and moved into this tiny one bedroom apartment, how my wife had given up her dream job to move here with me to start this church. I told God about how I was working bi-vocationally at a job I hated, just so I could pay the bills and do this church at night. I was really having this pity party about what was going on at our church.

It was somewhere right in there that God interrupted, as God sometimes does. I don't know what your denominational background is, I'm ordained Baptist, so I have to tell you that God spoke to me in my heart. If you're Pentecostal, you might just say, well, "God spoke to you." Whatever it was, God did begin to speak to me. God interrupted my pity party, and he started to remind me of all the things he'd done for me.

How he'd called me to New York City to be a pastor of this new church, even though I didn't deserve it. How he'd provided for me over all these years I'd been a Christian. How he'd forgiven me of my sins, saved my soul, and given me a home in heaven. Finally I said, "Okay God, I relent. I relent. What's going on here, what do I need to do?"

Over the next few weeks, God began to teach me some new things about being a pastor. He taught me about growth barriers, that I could unintentionally block his blessing in our new church.

Then God taught me about church systems, how I had to work to build systems that could be sustainable and repeatable over the long haul to help each person that walked through the doors of our church. Growth barriers and church systems, those are things I go into in other resources, but for our purposes today, one of the first things I felt like God asked me is this question. "Nelson, what are you doing with the first time gifts that I'm sending you each Sunday?"

At first I thought, surely, God meant guests, because we were having first time guests. Even though our church was declining in a sense, each week there were new people. In fact, I could point them out. I mean, in a church of 35, I could look around and say, "Well, you're new, you're new, and I've never seen you before." I would count them and write down a number on a card each week, and say, "Praise the Lord. We had three first time guests, or one first time guest." I'm sure there were Sundays where we had none.

The question God was asking me is, "What are you doing with those first time gifts I'm sending you?" Think about that language for a moment. Every week, God entrusts each of us with first time gifts. These are first time people who choose to come to our church. I answered back to God, "Well, God, I'm counting them and that's pretty much it. I'm hoping they come back." On occasion, I would pray for them and beg God to bring them back to our church.

I really didn't have an intentional process or an assimilation system to manage even those few first time guests we were having way back when. I started thinking about that. Well, if God is sending me a gift every week, then I ought to try to capture their information. I ought to do follow up with these first time guests. Many of them would fill out our early version of a communication card. We'll go into great detail about what a communication card is later.

Many of them were giving me their names and contact info, but I was just putting it in a file or putting it in a database and forgetting about it. The first thing I started doing was following up with my first time gifts. Then I thought, if somebody gave me a wedding gift or birthday gift, I would write them a hand-written note. I would send them a thank you note for that gift. I can't send a thank you note to God, but I can send a thank you note to each of these guests that God was entrusting to me.

Then I started to write hand-written notes to each of them, and we'll talk about that a little bit later as well. Over time, I began to develop this system we're going to talk about today. A system that allows you to move someone from first time guest to second time guest to regular attender, and then all the way to fully engaged members.

As I started taking care of the gifts that God was sending me, I began to see more and more people coming back for a second time.

Then we began to see more and more people come for the first time, because isn't that what the scripture says? If you're faithful with the few, you will be entrusted with the many.

Now, The Journey didn't turn around overnight. In fact, those early months were still pretty rough. By Christmas, we began to see some upturn. We were at least growing again. We weren't out of business by Christmas.

Then, into the new year, we began to grow a little bit more. On our first anniversary, we were almost back up

to where we had launched. Within a couple years, we were a church of 200. It seemed like a long time, but God was growing. As I look back, I can see those numbers and the increase. Then, many of you know, The Journey became one of the fastest growing churches in America.

I started coaching pastors, writing books, and you know the story of The Journey today. It started with that question. What are you doing with the first time gifts I'm sending you? That's really the question that is behind this entire seminar. What are you doing with the first time gifts that God is sending to your church? Maybe you have one first time guest a month, or maybe you have one per week, or maybe you have dozens a week.

In fact, as The Journey began to grow, I still remember that Sunday where we had as many first time guests on that particular Sunday as we had people in attendance when our church first launched. In other words, if you remember, we launched with 110 people. I remember, many years later, when we had 110 first time guests.

Today, that's not unusual. You put together all The Journey campuses and locations, we have hundreds of first time guests who come to our church, and now we have a system designed to build a connection with them, to invite them to come back for a second time, to help them find Christ in their life if they're not already a believer, to help them normalize their attendance in the church, and then to go through membership, where they can fully serve and fulfill God's purpose.

That's what this is all about. Yes, today, we're going to be talking about this system. I want to show you a system, and some very specific ideas and techniques that you can implement in your church. It's really about people. It's about those gifts that God is entrusting to you.

Why don't you take just a moment right now, before we go further, and just thank God for the first time gifts that he's sending you. Whether a few a month or many a week, or whatever it might be.

Say, "God, we're grateful." Then say, "God teach us and show us how we can manage these gifts that you've entrusted to us." Ask God to open up your heart and open up your mind to some new ideas. Ask God to give you the faith to try something new, and many of these ideas I'll be sharing with you, they'll be new ideas. Ask God to give you the faith to put some budget money in this area and to invest in these gifts that he's sending you. Ask God to give you an open heart and a sensitive mind to what we're going to talk about.

In fact, before we go further, why don't we take just a moment and pray together right now? Let me pray for you as you pray for one another.

God, I thank you for each person and each church that's part of this seminar. I pray that you will open our hearts and minds to what you want to say to us. God, I pray that you'll give me just the exact words I need to say to help each church and each pastor that's listening here.

God, we're grateful that every week and every month, you trust us with first time gifts, and we acknowledge that that is a statement of your faith in us and your hope for our church.

God, teach us to be faithful and take this system that I'll be teaching and apply it, and give supernatural insight to help each church that's listening, wherever they are in the world, whatever you're doing, whatever denominational background they may be from.

Help them to apply it to their church, so they can better move people from first time guest to fully engaged

members. We dedicate our time to you, we dedicate our future sessions to you. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

I want to go back to one of those phrases. I've talked about, what are you doing with the first time gifts that God is sending you. I want to quickly make a distinction between the word guest and the word visitor.

I talk about each guest as being a first time gift from God. Most churches do not use the guest language. I don't expect you to use the gift language, that was designed just to set our thinking and open up our hearts and minds for the seminar. I want to challenge your thinking when it comes to visitors. The difference between a visitor and a guest, in my mind, is very profound. A visitor is someone that you're really not expecting.

Imagine it's seven o'clock and you're finishing up dinner at your house, and there's a knock on your door, and you say, "Who is that? We're not expecting anyone."

Well, that person, at that moment, is a visitor. They're an unexpected person. The goal for a visitor is to dismiss them, to get rid of them as quickly as possible. Now, let's flip that scenario, and it's seven o'clock in the evening and some friends of yours, some invited guests. Someone maybe from your neighborhood or from your office.

You may know them well or you may know them hardly at all, but they knock on the door. This is someone you've been expecting. Someone you want to welcome into your home. It's probably someone you've even been preparing for. You know, before they even showed up, at seven o'clock, you were thinking about how to create a comfortable environment for them. If you're serving dinner, you may be thinking, "I wonder what they would like?"

You may have even asked them what they might enjoy. A guest is someone that you want to invite in. Very soon, you not only want to welcome them, but you want to start treating them like family. You want them to be comfortable. You want your night with them to be the best that it possibly can be.

A guest is someone that you're expecting. In fact, that's what I think a church is. A church is really a family that is expecting guests.

Just like you might prepare for a guest in your home, I want you to think about how you can prepare for guests in your church. How can you take someone who, right now, is now a stranger to God, but they are led by God's holy spirit to show up at your church. You welcome them in as a guest. You build a process and follow up system that is friendly and comfortable, and gets them to come back for a second time.

Now, they start thinking, maybe this is my place, maybe this is my home. As God does his work in their life, they may indeed be adopted into the family of God, through Jesus Christ, and they become a brother or sister inside the church, and then they become a joint heir with Christ Jesus as they grow and understand what it's all about. That process I laid out— and we'll come back to that a little bit later— that's the process that God works in our lives.

God, through his power, takes us from being strangers to being family members in Christ, to eventually being joint heirs with Christ.

We call that biblical hospitality. This approach in your church—yes, we call it assimilation. Yes, it is a system. But, it really is about you fulfilling the biblical hospitality that God has called your church to fulfill. You

invite in the stranger, you welcome them as a guest. Through God's power, they become a follower of Jesus, adopted into his family. They grow and become fully engaged members in your church, understanding what it means to be a joint heir with Christ Jesus.

That's what assimilation is. Your church is a family expecting guests. Here's what I want you to decide. Decide that you're no longer going to use the V word. In fact, in my vocabulary, the V word is a curse word. If I'm ever doing a seminar or in one of my coaching networks and someone talks about—

Sorry, I can hardly even say this curse word now. They're talking about visitors in their church, I sometimes say, "Why are you cursing at me? Why are you using that language?"

They're guests.

Let's think about how we can welcome guests into our church. For future sessions, we're going to look at how do you welcome those first time guests. Then, how do we turn first time guests into second time guests. There's something very significant about what happens when somebody comes to your church. Then we're going to look at how to move them to become regular attenders, and eventually into fully engaged members of your church.

Our key verse for this system is found in second Peter, chapter three, verse 18. Each of the scriptures I'm going to give you is from the New Living translation, but if you prefer a different translation use whatever works for you. In second Peter, 3:18, Peter tells us, "You must grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ."

You see, just as we must grow in the grace and knowledge of our Savior, Jesus Christ, we want to do everything we can to help these first time gifts, guests that come to our church, also grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ.

We want to create a welcoming environment where they can come in and learn about Jesus, and know Jesus personally, and grow in Him, and understand grace, and eventually become that fully developing follower. Just as you must grow as a follower, we must create environments and systems for that to happen as well.

If you've never heard me use the word system before, don't get too caught up on that. A system is a sustainable process you can use, whether you have one first time guest or you have 100 first time guests.

The point of a system is that it gives you a consistent, repeatable, sustainable, and scalable way to ensure that no first time guest falls through the cracks. I know that you want every first time guest who comes to your church to have a great experience. You want everyone to come back. You want everyone to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

As we move forward in our seminar, we're going to focus on three areas. This seminar is going to focus, first of all, on retaining first time guests, because that's really where assimilation starts.

Somebody comes to your church for the first time. That, technically, by the way, is the evangelism seminar, and I have other trainings on evangelism. How do you get more first time guests to your church, but assimilation that we're talking about, it picks up when someone comes for the first time. We're going to look at how do you retain those first time guests, and that's so critical.

In fact, the majority of our time is going to be on first time guests. If you get the first time guest experience

right, then it will help you with second time guests, regular attenders, and members. We're going to dive into first time guests here in just a few sessions.

Then we want to talk about how do you help those guests take next steps. Are those next steps clear? Are the next steps of sharing their contact info, is that clear?

Are the next steps spiritual steps, like becoming a follower of Jesus, and baptism, and eventually joining a group in membership, or participating in fun events? How do you make those clear? Yes, first time guests can come to your church and they can immediately take a step to get connected and to start building relationships inside of your church. We're going to focus on helping guests take next steps.

Then, really, number three, our third focus in this seminar, is on life transformation, because that's really what this is all about.

It is a system. There is going to be some very specific, sustainable, repeatable processes that I'm going to teach you, but it's really all about seeing a life transformed. If you think about your own life, there was a time you came to church for the first time. I imagine there's still a few people that were brought to church by their parents, but more and more, most of you are like me. You made a decision some time, as an adult, to come to church.

I remember my first experience with going to church as an adult. I had a few experiences with church as a child, but that wasn't part of my life until I was in college. I made a decision to go to a church. I didn't know where to enter, I didn't know where to go, I didn't understand all the terms. It was unfamiliar to me, but I remember that experience. That, for me, started what has now been a lifetime transformation process.

Going to church for the first time is what led me to Christ, and what led me to baptism, and led me to grow and led me to understand God's word, and it's radically transformed my life. I'm sure as you think about your story, that's true for many of you as well. Your life has been transformed because some church, some group of people that cared for you, they assimilated you. They helped you go from stranger to guest to family member to fully engaged follower.

This is a seminar about life transformation.

Now, from a technical standpoint, this seminar is going to make three big moves. In your listener's guide, we lay this out for you. The assimilation process that I teach is pretty linear. You'll be able to grasp it very easily because it's in sections, from section one to section two to section three.

The first step we're going to look at in our next session is how do you move someone from becoming a first time guest to a second time guest? From first time guest to second time guest.

That's step one. In our next session, we're going to look a lot at how do you create a welcoming environment for first time guests, how do you capture the follow up information for first time guests, and then how do you get them to come back a second time? That's stage one.

Stage two, or step two, is from being a second time guest to now being a regular attender. What do you do when someone comes back for a second time? How do you treat them differently from their first time?

More importantly, how do you help them normalize and regularize their attendance inside the church? There's some specific things that you can do. Specific next steps that you can help them take. Some

intentional relationships that you can build with that person, some specific responsibilities you can give a second time guest to help them become a regular attender.

A regular attender, by my definition, as we'll look at, is someone who now is calling your church their home. You're the preferred church they go to, and two times a month or three times a month, they're in attendance. Maybe one time a month, but they're regular, it's their place. They have now found your church.

That takes us to our third big step or stage in the assimilation seminar, and that is from regular attender to fully engaged member. Maybe your church has a formal membership process, or maybe just after a long time, someone does sort of consider themselves a member, but either way, this is where they're no longer casual about their attendance. They're living it out. They're fully engaged in the church. They're attending, they're serving, they're giving, they're growing.

They're what we call core people inside of a church. I'm a big fan of a formalized membership process. I'll show you how we do that, but I won't spend a lot of time on that, because a lot of churches do it very differently. I do think it's important that you have a way for people to self-identify regular attender versus a fully engaged member. That'll be our last session.

From a time standpoint, we're going to spend most of our time on stage one. We're going to spend more sessions than any other on that move from first time guest to second time guest, because there's so many things you want to do to welcome first time guests, and if you get that right it'll have a bleed over or spillover effect into all other areas.

Start thinking what that process is in your church now. What are you currently doing when it comes to first time guests? What are you currently doing when it comes to second time guests? Then, what are you currently doing in helping regular attenders move to membership.

Perhaps, a discussion you may want to have, or some thinking you may want to do after this first session is, what am I doing for first time guests? Am I capturing their information? How many first time guests do we have on an average Sunday? Where are the holes in our process, where are the places where it seems like guests sort of fall off and they fall through the cracks? Then, what can we begin to do to improve?

A very specific action step I want to give you here at the end of our first session is that I want you to start, this week, praying for your first time guests. Take some time, maybe on Sunday afternoon or maybe on Monday, and pray for each of those first time guests that you have. Take time to thank God, that he is entrusting your church with these specific gifts. Pray for those individuals that are there.

A lot of times, even if you just have basic contact info from someone, you know a lot about them. You know if they're married. Maybe it's mister and misses that fill out that follow up card, and you know they're married, so you can pray for that marriage. Maybe you have an email address, and you see it's tied to a local business or local corporation, then you can pray for them and their workplace and where they might spend most of their time.

Maybe they give you an address and you have a general idea of where they live, or perhaps they give you children names and you can pray for their kids and pray for their relationships. Maybe they tell you their age, this tells you something about them. You may not know everything about your first time guest, but you can use your Godly insight to pray for them as specifically as you can.

Perhaps you're listening to this as a team, maybe you and the team can pray for those first time guests. In

fact, maybe one of the action steps after this session is to go back and pull the names of some first time guests that have been to your church over the last month and pray for them even right now. Pray for them by name. Ask God to give you the heart to develop this assimilation seminar, so that you can take care of every guest from here on out that God's going to send you.

Know that I'm going to be praying for you, and I hope you'll be praying for me as I teach this session. I know the power of assimilation. You see, as I teach this to you, today, I stand on a track record of having trained over 3,000 churches to use this system. In fact, it's more than 3,000. To be quite frank with you, I stopped collecting the testimonies or stopped counting the testimonies at around 3,000. I've seen churches have dramatic turnarounds by working on their assimilation process.

In fact, I've seen churches that are 100 or 150 years old that have been stagnant for a long time go to work on what we're talking about here and start seeing that turnaround. It's not going to be instant, but month after month as they focus on these first time gifts and on the few, God begins to bless them with more, and then they take care of those, and God begins to bless them with more.

Maybe you're an old established church, and, perhaps, things have been a little stagnant and you're ready for that turnaround. This will help you do it. The thing I see many times is a new church, a young church, or maybe a growing church.

They come in and implement these systems, and they immediately see a lot of growth. If you're a church planter, you build the assimilation from the start. After we started other locations and other churches, out of The Journey, we could put this system in immediately.

That allowed those other campuses and other churches to grow faster than that original campus I was telling you about. Wherever you are, and whatever stage of life you're in as a church, this is going to have a dramatic impact on your church.

I'm praying for that, and I hope you'll pray for that. In fact, why don't you take some time to pray right now, and I'll be back for our next session to start talking about first time guests.

UPDATED AND EXPANDED:

**THE NEW
ASSIMILATION
SEMINAR**



**FOUR KEYS
FOR A GREAT
FIRST-TIME GUEST
EXPERIENCE**

Nelson: Okay, welcome back. In this session we're going to look at how do you treat, greet, seat and then follow up with first time guest? Okay, we probably won't get to all of that in this session, but we're going to take a pretty good chunk of it. Then we'll spend at least two sessions on first time guest.

Now, as we get into today's session, let me just remind you of our key verse for assimilation, it's from II Peter 3:18. It reads, "You must grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ."

The truth is, for most people that process of growing in Jesus Christ, of understanding who Jesus is, it starts when they come to church for the first time. I don't know if you can remember, in your own personal walk with God, when you came to church for a first time.

Coming to church for the first time can be a very intimidating process. Even if you can't remember coming to church for the first time, you can certainly remember going on vacation and checking into a hotel for the first time. Perhaps you went to a large resort and you walk in there, and you're not even sure where to park, or where to unload your luggage or where the front desk is. This can be a confusing and unsettling experience, to go somewhere where you've never been for the first time.

Well, when it comes to first time guest, they have the same experience as you have when you go somewhere for the first time. But, unfortunately, coming to church is even more intimidating. It's a very intimidating thing for someone who's never been to church, to show up at a church for the first time. They don't know where to park; they don't know if they're going to be welcomed, they don't know if they're going to like the people, they don't know if they can trust you with their children, they don't even know where to enter. Some of you have renovated your sanctuary so much, if they come in what looks like the main door, they are actually walking into the choir loft.

This is something we really have to think about, that first time guest experience. A lot of people will come to church for the first time, but it's a very difficult challenge to get them to return to church for a second time. Here's a startling statistic, people decide whether or not they're coming back to your church within the first seven minutes of arriving. So, within the first seven minutes, they're making up their mind, am I going to like this church and am I going to come back.

You have seven minutes to make a good impression. Now there are things to do to overcome that, if you make a bad impression, so it's not like you only chance, God will give you grace and hopefully power, even if you mess it up. We want to do all that we can in those first seven minutes, to make a good impression on our first time guest.

If you think about it, if you're a teaching pastor or a preaching pastor, or a senior pastor, first time guest have probably already made up their mind before you've even delivered the first word of your sermon. Contrary to what you may think, first time guest often show up early, they're the early arrivers, it's your regular attendees that often show up late.

So, they show up before the service starts, maybe they sit in the parking lot for a couple of minutes and watch people go in and out of your building to try and figure out how the floor might work, they might go in and sort of spy on the children's area before they go to check in, they might arrive in the sanctuary when there's just a handful of people. What they are thinking about, what they are experiencing, what you are putting in their hands, how are you creating that experience, basically from the parking lot all the way into the church, and then once they get back home.

Well, that is what we are going to look in these sessions. When someone comes to your church for the first

time, I want you to focus on four big areas, and so this session and the next session will be broken down into these four big areas. This session and the next session will be broken down into these four big areas.

The first area that we're going to look at is what I call pre-service. Pre-service, this is the focus that I want you to have in your church before the service even starts. You can think of the pre-service area, as the area of first contact. It's the time they arrive into your parking lot and they make it all the way into the pew. Or the way I like to think about that is, from the street to the seat. So, before the service even starts, you've got to get them from the street in to the seat.

Now, let me just put you in the mind of someone coming to church for the first time. Maybe, you can think of someone who recently was a guest at your church. I almost said a visitor at your church, I'd of been cursing at you here, at our second session. Think of someone who recently was a guest at your church for the first time. If you know them, maybe you can literally visualize them.

Let's just take a family, who lives down the street, maybe it's a mom and a dad, and they've got one or two children, or maybe more likely, it's a mom and a step-dad, and it's a mixed family, and he has a child from the first marriage and they have a child together. Whatever the situation might be, on Saturday night, that family makes a bold decision to say, we're going to go to church tomorrow, and the kids say, church, oh what does that even mean, what time are we going to have to get up, we're going to miss Sunday morning television. Maybe dad's a little bit reluctant, or maybe mom's a little reluctant.

But, somehow or another this family makes a courageous decision, I would say, lead by the spirit, probably, God is already working in their life, through some tension, transition, or trouble that they are going through. For the first time in a long time, or maybe for the first time, since never, they are thinking about going to church.

Now, on Sunday morning, they have all of these dreams about what that Sunday morning is going to be like. Maybe dad thinks, I'm going to get up early and cook pancakes for the entire family, and I'm going to make this a great Sunday morning, the best Sunday morning that we've ever had. Mom has dreams about how she's going to dress and how she is going to dress the children and how they're going to make it down to that church.

Now, that's going on in the positive side of their mind, on the flip side, they're thinking, I wonder if we'll be welcomed? I wonder if we'll see anybody we know, I wonder if they'll be people like us, I wonder what the children's ministry might be like, I wonder what the pastor is going to teach on? So, they have all of these concerns as well, but even on the best of Sunday mornings, in this particular couple's life, everything is going to go wrong.

You see, when someone decides to come to church for the first time, it's almost like they're sort of inviting the enemy to do everything he can to distract them. So, Satan begins to work in that couple's mind. In that home, the alarm clock doesn't go off, the pancakes get burned, the kids spill something on their new outfits, mom didn't have enough time to get dressed like she would like to get dressed.

But, in spite of all of that negative things that happened to try and prevent them from coming, let's just imagine, somehow or another, that couple gets into the car, they make it out of their driveway, and they arrive onto your church property.

Well, at that point, when they pull into your church parking lot, assimilation begins. You may not be able to control what happens at home, you may not be able to control whether or not they come to church, you

may be able to in some way, by the way, that's another seminar that I have on evangelism. But, when they pull into that parking lot, you want to do everything you can to make that the best first seven minutes of their life.

Let's talk about that area of first contact, or the big area of pre-service. So, when someone pulls into your parking lot, as they're in the parking lot, as they're making their way into your building, there are four areas of first contact.

So, four areas of first contact, and here's number one. Number one, how are they going to be greeted, g-r-e-e-t-e-d, how are they going to be greeted. Now, when you think about greeted, and I'll explain why they all start with e-d, you'll see as we go along, but when you think about greeted, you often think about greeters. I want to talk about greeters and give you some advice on greeters. In fact, in the supplemental resources that you have with the seminar, you can see basic job description as to what a greeter should do.

They are really two types of greeting that a person, coming to your church for the first time, would receive. The first is the inanimate greeting, of all the inanimate stuff at your church, all the non-human stuff. For example, your parking lot is a greeter, your sign is a greeter, and your signage is a greeter. So, what is the physical environment of your church saying to the people who are attending for the first time? How does your sign look? How is the yard maintained? Is the parking lot clean? Are entry points clearly marked in your church?

It's very expensive, of course, to keep all of this stuff up to date. If you've got a large parking lot, that can be very expensive, just to maintain that. I'm not talking about perfection, don't get me wrong. I'm talking about excellence. So, let me give you my definition of excellence. Excellence is doing the best you can with what you've got. It's doing the best you can with what you've got.

Yes, maybe you're a church that's been struggling for a long time, and the parking lot, it needs a lot of repair. But, you can do the best you can with what you've got. You can pick up the litter out of the parking lot, you can weed it, and you can spray it and remove all the weeds from the parking lot. You may not be able to repave it, or to repaint it, but you can do the best you can with what you've got.

You may not be able to afford a lot of the expensive landscaping, but you can keep things neat and trim. Volunteers in your church can make that lawn or that upkeep around the church, the landscaping, look as good as it possibly can.

Well, you see all of these things are greeting people who arrive. Your landscaping and your church sign and your parking lot saying, we've been expecting you, we want to put our best foot forward, you're welcome here at our church. Or, it's been saying go away, we don't care, we're outdated, we're no longer relevant. Of course, I know which one you want, you want the physical surroundings of church, to put forward the best greeting they possibly can. The truth is, some simple landscaping, a fresh coat of paint, that can make all the difference in the world.

Now, for most of our Journey locations, because we are in major metropolitan areas and we do have locations that are not, in urban areas, but for most of our Journey locations, we meet in rented facilities. Now, some of our places own their own building or have a long term lease, like many of you. But, a lot of our churches meet in rented facilities.

I remember one time we were meeting in an elementary school. We couldn't do a whole lot about the broken sidewalk out front of the elementary school, we couldn't do a lot about those little toilets that they

have in elementary school. But, people knew that we were meeting in an elementary school, they knew we had no control over the sidewalk, they knew we had no control over those little toilets in the bathroom, we were in an elementary school.

Here's what we could do, we could do the best we could with what we had. We can do the best we can, with what we have, that's my definition of excellence. So, we can clean those toilets, we can spray down that elementary school restroom, we can sweep and even mop or spray down the sidewalk out front, we could do the best we could do.

That's what I'm really asking you to do, to put your best foot forward, to do what you can do. If you have money, by all means, this is a great place to invest it, but if you don't, do the best you can with what you have.

The truth is if you're in a rented facility, you probably get a little more grace from those who attend, than if you own your own facilities. Because, people know if you own it, if you're there twenty-four seven, seven days a week, than you should be able to keep it as clean and as well kept as possible.

But, there is this area of greeted and the physical surroundings, hopefully said, everyone who comes to your church, you're welcome, come on in, we've been expecting you, we wanted to put our best foot forward.

Just like I was talking in the last session, if you were coming to my house for dinner, if you were my guest, we would clean up; we would do the best we could. We might sweep some of the toys underneath the coach, but we would at least do the best we could, so that's the physical surroundings, when it comes to greeted.

Now, another part of the greeted area, is your greeters, these are the people, literally, that stand out in front of your church, or stand at the door of the church and they welcome people. I mentioned that I was on staff at a large church in southern California, in fact, many years ago, before I started The Journey. In southern California, it was common to have greeters who would literally hug you in the parking lot. I mean it was southern California; they were a hugging crowd out in southern California.

When I moved to New York City, I knew it probably would not be wise to have greeters that would hug you. New Yorkers think, if you're going for a hug, you might just be going for their wallet, and they are a little uncertain about that.

So, I really had to adapt this to my culture, and I want to encourage you to adapt this to your culture. More and more people today, they don't like to shake hands, but the first thing we think about, when it comes to a greeter, is that you offer to shake somebody's hands. More and more people are germophobic, and they're some very well known celebrities and folks who don't like to shake hands, well, a lot of people are like that.

More people in America are introverts, than they are extroverts. I don't know necessarily outside of America, but imagine this is true for many western civilizations and then depending on your culture, wherever you are, you have to adapt this.

So, what does a friendly greeting mean for you? Another, if you're in an Asian culture, that means something very different, than if you're in a Latino culture, or if you're in an Anglo culture, so you've got to adapt this, but I want you to think about it. How can we put our best greeters out in front of our church, and then what kind of greeting do we want our greeters to give?

We've learned at The Journey, especially in New York City, that perhaps just a wave and a welcome is

enough. Welcome to The Journey, come on in. Now, we often do welcome to The Journey with one greeter, and we have a little candy basket, for another greeter, and I'll tell you where I got that idea a little bit later. We want to welcome people; I want to put friendly people out front.

Have you ever noticed that sometimes if you ask people to volunteer to be greeters, it's only the unfriendly people who volunteer? Now, why is that? Well, you want people who can smile. In fact, I really want, at minimum, two things from my greeters. I want my greeters to be able to smile, and many times on Sunday, we do smile practice with our greeters. I want them to smile, and if possible, I want them to have all their teeth; that might be a little harder to find, [laughing] but that's really at minimum what I want.

I want them to be friendly, I want them to be knowledgeable in at least the basics of where to go and where would you check in your children, where are the rest rooms, these are things people want to know when they come for the first time. We train our greeters every Sunday.

When you pull up this job description that we have in the resource area, along with this seminar, that list of what a greeter does in their position, x number of minutes before the service, smile and say, welcome to The Journey, to every person who attends. Stay there and all down the line of different things we have in our job description, we go over that every single Sunday.

The reason why is, even if they're the most dedicated greeters, they forget, they forget what their job is. Even if they served the previous week, a whole week in their lives has happened, they've been at work, they've been engaged in other things. So, we want to give a friendly, upbeat reminder every week of what a greeter is suppose to do.

Then, yes, we do allow people to be volunteer greeters, but we're careful about who we put out front, our most visible greeters are the ones that put the best foot forward. If we have someone, that maybe we are unsure about, we might just ask them to serve at our resource table, or ask them to serve as a directional person.

We want to make our ushers and our greeters, and that's really what we put in this area, ushers and greeters, we want to make them the best that we can. Your ushers and greeters, they want to do a good job for you, but maybe you have to take a little time to train them.

Think about your greeters, your physical greeters, and then also the physical surroundings, and all of that goes into this first area of first contact, called greeted. Then, there is the second area of first contact, and that is directed. Directed, first time guest want to be directed as to where they should go and where they need to go, so direction is very important.

To back up for just a bit, think about the last time you were lost. Maybe you were driving a car; maybe you were on a business trip or perhaps on vacation, or maybe just even on a different side of town that you normally find yourself. How did it feel to be directionally lost? We can talk about being spiritually lost, I understand that's the business that we're in, but just for a moment, think about what it means to be directionally lost.

Now today, we rarely ever are, we've all got GPSs and we've got all these gadgets, and those are things that help us out. Before we had all of that I was rarely ever lost, you see, I'm a guy, and guys, we don't believe we're lost until we're out of gas. [laughing] Okay, so we're fine, we'll just keep driving around, but if you ever remember that unsettling feeling of not knowing your way around. Maybe you're a hiker and you've been lost in the woods before, this can be very unsettling, this can create a lot of anxiety in your life.

Well, when that couple that we were thinking about before had made that brave decision to come to church, when they pull into your parking lot and they are directionally confused, it raises, already, sky-high level of anxiety. So, you want to do everything you can, directionally, to lower that anxiety. Maybe you have some greeters in the parking lot that tell people where to park.

If you've ever been to Disney Land or Disney World, you know how powerful those parking lot attendants can be to create a great initial impression. Even if you have a big enough parking lot, or it's clear and you don't need physical greeters in the parking lot, you might need some directional signs, as to where to park.

Parenthetically, let me just say, I'm really not a big fan of people who give assigned parking to first time guests, or even things that some churches do, where they say, turn on your blinkers or turn on your lights if you're a first time guest. I know there will be first time guest who will use them, and that may be reason enough, but more and more, especially if people are previously un-churched or de-churched, or if they haven't been to church for a long time, they really want to remain anonymous.

One of the big fears that your first time guest have, especially those that have no current relationship with God, is they want to be one of the crowd, they want to be anonymous. Just know if you're using those kinds of techniques to try to make it easy for your first time guest, that really only works for Christians who are already churched, that are looking for a new church. For an un-churched person, they're not going to turn on their lights, they're not going to park in the first time guest parking lot, because they don't know what that might signal to you, and what that might do to them, to be recognized in that way.

So, you want good direction, not just the preferred parking, but direction as to where to park, and then direction about where to enter. From a very simple standpoint, is it really clear for someone who's never been to your church, where they enter? You want a big sign out front that says, enter here, worship space here, kids check-in there, student room here, you may think you have enough directional signs, but here's what I want to challenge you to do, double it, or even triple it.

Have signs that are up high, have signs that are down low, have signs that are on the corners, have people standing to offer directions with lanyards or nametags and say, ask me, I'm here to help. You want to direct people as much as you can, this allows for a great first impression.

Greeted, directed, and by the way directional signs and all that, that's pretty inexpensive to provide. Then here's a third area, treated, how are they greeted, directed, and how are they treated?

Now, this is a little more of an atmospheric type idea. A little more ephemeral – Just a little more of a feeling type area than perhaps greeted or directed. I mean, directed you either have the signs or you don't, greeted, you've got friendly greeters who smile and got good physical surroundings or you don't.

When I talk about treated, I'm really talking about how a guest might feel when they come to your church. Do they get a positive vibe from your church? That sounds like a good southern Californian phrase, do they feel welcome when they come to your church? Are you treating them with respect? You know respect, and you know, respect starts in the parking lot, respect starts with the signs, respect means you think about where they are versus where you are. You think about how they feel versus how you feel as a long-time member of the church.

A first time guest wants to be treated with respect and in a way that makes him or her feel like the church is glad that you are there. I don't have this in my notes, but you know they Bible verse right? Where it says, I was glad when they said unto me, let us go to the house of the Lord.

You want people to feel that joy when they walk into your church. If we're honest, we've all been to churches where it didn't seem like the people were glad that we were there. In fact, I've been to a few churches where I felt like they were sad that they had to be there, and I felt kind of sad myself. I've been to at least one church I can remember where I almost thought they were mad that I was there. They were like, who are you and what are you doing here, and why are you messing up our church?

Well, I want to create this warm, friendly, glad environment. Yes, you do that with the parking lot, yes, you do that with signs, yes, you do that with smiling faces, but many times it's the little touches. It's the little things show that you care. When it comes to assimilation, little things don't mean a lot, they mean everything.

Let me give you an example of this. My wife and I were both in college and somebody gifted us one time with a weekend away. The Ritz-Carlton, which was about 4 hours from our house, was running a weekend special for ninety-nine dollars, and a caring couple said, you guys have worked really hard, you're both in school, they gifted us with a weekend at the Ritz-Carlton.

Now, full confession, contrary of how I look and sound, I'm not the normal customer for a Ritz-Carlton. I tend to stay in much lower brands of hotels, probably like you. This was a real experience for me, and at that particular time, I've never been anywhere this ritzy, forgive the pun. But, we arrived at the Ritz-Carlton, just to tell you the story, I was in graduate school at Duke University, in the Raleigh-Durham of North Carolina, and the Ritz-Carlton was in D.C.

After school, we get into the car, we drive up to D.C. and we arrive in the early evening at the Ritz-Carlton and it's only valet parking. At that time, I'll tell you, as a young college student, I didn't have a lot of experience with valet parking, I was a little intimidated to pull into the valet parking and immediately, the valet attendants came out.

Now, if you've ever been to the Ritz-Carlton, and I think they still do this to this day, they're dressed up, they have the hat, they have the tails, they have the tuxedo. The first attendant runs around to my side opens up my car door and then immediately goes around to the other side and opens up my wife's car door, and he says these words, "Whom are we welcoming to the Ritz-Carlton?" My wife Kelly said, "I'm Kelly Searcy, this is my husband Nelson", to which the first attendant immediately turned to the second attendant and said, "Mr. and Mrs. Searcy, from North Carolina have arrived." Now, let's just pause right there for a second.

First of all, I sort of straightened up in the seat and thought, I have arrived. I may not have arrived, I've arrived at the Ritz-Carlton, and they're welcoming me. My second thought was, how does he know where from North Carolina? Well, it seems, as he left my car door to go behind the car to open up Kelly's door, he glanced at the license plate, and then made an assumption to his friend who was at the computer that Mr. and Mrs. Searcy must be from North Carolina.

Well, he was right in the case, we were in graduate school in North Carolina. While he was helping us out of the car and with our luggage, his colleague was pulling up our name and pulling up our room number, so that we could be ready and go straight to our rooms and get checked in.

Of course, we're wowed, we get our keys and we make our way to our room, and we're wowed by our room, we are wowed by our experience from North Carolina, but we were also hungry. At the Ritz-Carlton, whether we're wowed by this Ritz-Carlton experience, but we were also hungry, so we sort of put our stuff down, and headed back out to have dinner.

As we walk back by the front of the hotel, the same person who welcomed us said, Mr. and Mrs. Searcy, enjoy your dinner. We went and had dinner, we came back, and the same person was still working at the front area said Mr. and Mrs. Searcy, welcome back.

Well, at this point, I'm so intrigued; I've got to have a conversation with this guy. How in the world can they remember our names and treat us the way they are treating us. I talked to the valet and he says, we're trained at the Ritz-Carlton to call people by name the second time that we see them. So, I've been rehearsing your name since I first welcomed you earlier this evening.

Now, every time I see you, I want to be able to welcome you by name, and we have a practice here to welcome people by name the second time forward.

I may have to ask you the second time, but from there on out, I will know your name. I said, how often are you reminded of this? He said, every shift, we're reminded to call guest by name. I said, what do you mean every shift? He said, well, before my shift starts, and all the employees start their shift, we have a pre-shift meeting, where we go through the Ritz-Carlton credo.

I said, okay, what's the Ritz-Carlton credo? He says, we are ladies and gentlemen serving ladies and gentlemen. Then after we go over the credo, we go through these very specific instructions. These values that we have, these practices like calling guest by name, like giving you the best night stay that you can possibly have, and he listed off several others that you can find books and articles about the Ritz-Carlton and discover.

I'm just amazed by this, we leave this and before we head up to our room, we notice there's a restroom in the lobby, so we decided to take advantage of that, my wife goes into her restroom, and I go into mine, when we come back out, we both have this amazement on our face, because in her restroom, at the sink they had a lot of nice lotions and a lot of nice soaps, and even some mints. Now, in my restroom, they didn't have necessarily the nice lotions and the soaps, but I didn't care, they had these great mints, so we both walk out with this mouth full of these mints, and we were saying, there were mints in our restroom.

We were so wowed by this; in fact if you come to The Journey today, you'll be offered a mint. If you go to any Journey restroom you'll find mints and mouthwash in the guy's restroom and you'll find soaps and lotions and mints, and things like that in the ladies restroom.

Because I thought that Ritz-Carlton got it right, in fact by the time we were done with our weekend stay we were amazed over and over. I began to think about that. They're in the good night's sleep business; I mean compared to the places that I normally stay, the Ritz-Carlton is in the same business. Not just to give you a good night's sleep, to give you a place to stay in a city you don't have a home in.

But the qualitative difference between some of the places I often stay and the Ritz-Carlton is tremendous. Well, I've tried to adopt that treated feeling at The Journey. I want you to feel like you're special; I want you to have a good experience, even in the restrooms. I want our greeters to treat you with respect and give the impression that you have arrived.

Yes, I know it's a little more felt than it is taught, but it is those little things, like what you have in the restroom, about how your greeters call people by name. I've never personally been all that great at remembering people's names. I've worked at it, I'm a lot better now than I used to be when I went into ministry, but I have some people on my team, they can remember people from the first time that they meet.

Well, we want that kind of culture; we want that kind of welcoming environment. We're not trying to be Ritz-Carlton. We're not in the sleep business. In fact we're in something far more profound. We're in the eternity business. We're in the business of welcoming people into our church family. So think about how you can treat people with dignity and respect, like they're welcome.

Then the last area is how they are seated. How are they seated, this is simply, literally giving them a seat, a seat in your worship auditorium, or in your worship space, or your sanctuary.

You want to have ushers who know how to seat, ushers who know how to invite people to slide to one side or another so that they can make their way in. Since the heart of our ministry is in New York City, the people who do this best are the people at the Broadway shows. If you've ever been to a Broadway show in New York City, or perhaps in your town, you know that these ushers really know what they're doing.

They give you something to hold, they give you a program, and even large, grown men, they somehow feeling more comfortable if they're holding something in their hands. I'm a big fan of using a program in your church, or a bulletin and I'll show you how to do that in future sessions, but you give people something to hold, and then you help them find their seat.

If your church is very crowded, you have particular ways and processes that you've developed to find a seat, but more than likely, people will be able to find a seat in your church and then sit down and they're ready for our second focus area, but that's going to be in our next session.

In this session, we've looked at the pre-service area, and I've given you four areas of first contact, four areas to think about in the pre-service area, from the street to the seat. In the next session we're going to pick up our couple, our first time guest, they're in the sanctuary, what do we need to do now, but that's next time, see you then.

UPDATED AND EXPANDED:

**THE NEW
ASSIMILATION
SEMINAR**



**THE ONE THING
YOU WANT
FIRST-TIME
GUESTS TO DO**

Nelson: Welcome back! We're in the middle of a discussion about first time guests. The last time, we learned that the average person who comes to your church for the first time will make up their mind within the first seven minutes. Remember, a lot of times before the first song is ever started and definitely before you, as the speaker or the preacher, ever begin your sermon people have made up their minds. In the last session we looked at that area of first contact. What I called "from the street to the seat." We talked about how are people greeted, how are they directed, how are they treated, and how are they seated. I hope you had a great discussion about little things you could do to improve in each of those areas.

Well, if you recall from last time, we left our first time guest couple sitting in the auditorium. They are now in that auditorium and they're waiting for the service to start or they're going to experience the service. I'm at letter B) in your notes, which is the second area of moving someone from first time guest to second time guest. And the second area relates to during the service and the fill-in is: connection card.

Now, what I will not get in to in this seminar is actually what you do in your service, what songs do you sing and what messages do you deliver. In fact, we have another system where we focus on the worship planning system and I talk about various things about how you might plan a service and how you might even plan a sermon series that might be attractive to first time guests. For our purposes, in this seminar it's all about what is the one thing you want a first time guest to do when they're sitting in your service. From the system perspective it is: you want them to complete a connection card.

Now, you'll notice I call it a connection card. Perhaps a more generic term for this might be a communication card. What I don't want to call it, if you remember, is I don't want to call it a "visitor card" because that's a dirty word. This is not a visitor card. This is not a visitor form. In fact, I'm going to show you that one of the best ways to get your guests to complete their connection card is to ensure that every person completes a connection card. It's not just for your guest, it is for everybody in your church and I'll talk about that even in later sessions for you. For our purposes, we want to talk about that connection card and how do you get a first time guest to share with you their information.

The truth is if you do not have that information, if you don't have the minimal contact info, like name and email address or address or maybe even they're willing to share a cell number with you. If you don't have that basic contact information, then it is impossible for you to follow up with those first time guests.

Now, I will tell you, at The Journey we are laser-focused on this and when I work with my coaching participants and the assimilation coaching network and some of my other advance coaching networks, we have become fanatics about this connection card. In fact, we've almost developed what we would call a "connection card-ology," sort of a methodology of how you do this connection card. We're always tweaking our connection cards, we're playing with the color, we're playing with the size, we're playing with the layout of the information on the card and we're measuring. I mean, like someone would measure a basketball game or a football game, about how many people complete this part of the card. If we change it this way, will they complete more of the card?

What you're seeing in the supplemental resources with this seminar is, you're seeing the best connection card that we have to date and we keep this constantly updated. You won't be able to see this perhaps on camera, but this is basically a connection card. It is a small card like this that goes inside everyone's program. At a certain point inside of the message, we ask people to take out this card and to fill it out and then turn it in with the offering.

Now this is printed, and you won't be able to tell again exactly from your view or if you're just listening to this you won't be able to tell, but it's printed on card stock. In other words, if I'm filling out this card with

my pen is not going to poke through like it might on regular paper. You can test out different weights and I don't know exactly what weight this one is I have here, but it's definitely like a postcard that you would buy at the U.S. Post Office or the postal service in your country. It's just a little heavier. It's convenient for me to fill out. It doesn't bend as readily as regular, traditional paper.

Then, we're able to print these in-house and we've actually found no difference as to whether you print them full color or just in black and white like the one I have here so, by all means, black and white is fine. We actually print them on a regular sheet of paper and we print them three-up. Here's connection card one, two, and three and then you can simply cut these cards and put it inside your program.

I've tested various sizes, I've tested a smaller card, I've tested a wider card, I've tested a narrow card, but I've basically settled on this three-up pattern as the most effective card. Now generally speaking, the churches I've coached they can get anywhere from 75% to 90% of the people in their congregation to fill out their connection card. Again, this is the entire congregation filling out the card and I'll talk about that in more detail in just a moment, but the idea is if you get everyone in your church to fill out a card then your first time guest will feel comfortable completing the card.

So, because I like the card, and I like it inside the bulletin or inside the program, let me tell you a few things that are very difficult to use. In the past there has been this guest registration book and this is often a little book that sits at the end of each aisle or each pew and then people would pass that down the aisle and they would ask the guest to take the book and to sign in. It's sort of like a guest log, if you will, that is passed down each of the aisles and guests complete it.

Well, there's a lot of problems with that. Number one is it's not always the most user friendly. Number two is everybody's information, particularly if they're at the beginning of the row, it's now public to everybody who is on down the row. It's very hard to maintain the quality of that. Perhaps children during the service will write in the book or maybe you forget to take out the bad pages from the book or the used pages. Then, if all of your guests are sitting in one aisle and there's seven or eight people that need to fill out that book, it may never make its way all the way down the aisle and the other aisles, where there's no guests, they're done and they're ready to move on in the service. So, I would avoid using that kind of guest book.

I would also avoid calling this card a "visitor card" or a "guest card" because the card is for more than just your guests, as you will see later on, it can be used by your church. It's actually a spiritual growth card but we call it a "connection card."

I don't like putting the card in the back of the seats in front of you, sort of that pew rack that a lot of churches might have or, even if you have nice comfy seats, there's often a little pocket that you can put this in. A lot of people like to put it in that pocket and they like to put a pen there with it or a little pencil, like a little golf course pencil, there with it.

There's a lot of problems with that too. I mean, pencils get broken, they rarely get traded out, the pens go dead and maybe you don't notice for months. Then these cards get ruffled because people will put their feet on their card or they'll get bent as people are going in and out of the aisles and then, people have this belief that if it's in the back of that pew rack, then it belongs to the church. If you put the card inside the program or the bulletin, they believe it's theirs. You want them to think of the card as their card. This is their card that they're going to complete and its protected inside that program.

Now you may say, "Nelson, you weren't kidding. You really take these cards seriously." Well, you're exactly right, I do take these cards very seriously because I know if I don't get a connection card on a first time guest

who comes to our church, then I have no ability to follow up with that person. If I can't follow up with them, the chances of them coming back for a second time are seriously diminished.

You know, I have an older brother who is a professional sales person. He actually sells limousines. I asked him one time, I said, "Mike, what's the difference between the high performing sales people and the low performing sales people?" and he said, "About a million dollars a year," but that's another story. I said, "No, no. Just practically what's the difference?" He says, "Well, the high performing sales people we follow up, we follow up, we follow up. The low performing sales people they make one call and if the client says, 'no,' they move on to somebody else." We say "I really believe in follow up." In fact, we're going to get into some follow up practices that want you to adopt in your church, but before you can actually follow up you have to get the contact info and you have to get that in a comfortable, easy to share way.

One last thought on this before we go into your notes. I like printing my connection card in-house and you have my sample and you can take that and create your own connection card for use at your church. One of the reasons I like to print it in house is I've yet to find an off the shelf card that's easy to complete. A lot of times the spaces are really small. They barely have room for someone who has a long last name or a long first name to write their name. They often will have a little tiny line for an email address, but more and more people will have these long email addresses. Particularly if its like first name dot last name at and then the name of your business with your website. So, you want to have plenty of space. Often times they're really crowded and they're often printed on cheap paper that your pen or pencil will poke through. I think a lot about these areas because someone's eternity may hang on whether or not they fill out this connection card.

Let's talk about how it works. I give you three connection card steps in your notes. Number one is everyone completes a card each week. Everyone completes a card each week. Now, lets talk about that. First of all, I mean everyone. The card is inside of everyone's bulletin. This card is designed so that it's about the size of the average bulletin. It fits inside of the bulletin and, just further on that, you should know that on the outside of the bulletin we clip a pen to each of the bulletins.

We're giving them the pen, the bulletin, and then inside that bulletin they have a set of message notes that they can follow along with my teaching, they have an offering envelope. That's in the stewardship seminar because if you have offering envelopes in the pew rack people think that's the church's offering envelope. If it's in their bulletin, it's theirs and they're more likely to use it, but again, you have to see the stewardship seminar for that. Then, also, you have this connection card.

So, bulletin, pen, connection card. This is what everyone receives when they walk in. You got to make sure your greeters give everyone a bulletin with a connection card inside of it when they come in. Then, we're asking everyone to fill out a connection card and they do it every week. One of the things you can do is you can train is you can train your members, your regular attenders, to fill out your connection card. This may take you three or four months or maybe even six months to get it into your culture. If you follow along with that connection card script that we have in the resource area and you deliver that in your hosting time with the same precision as I lay it out in the script you will find very quickly that your regular attenders and members will fill out the card.

In fact, when you go to that script, and I don't have time to it all right now but maybe it's something you want to read or study after this session. If you go into that script you'll notice, after the general welcome to the church, it says "Everyone look inside your program, find your connection card. Go ahead and take that pen that we gave you and start filling out your connection card. If you're a regular attender or member all you need to do is fill out your name and email unless some of your information has changed, but if you are

a first time guest with us today, we ask you to complete as much information on the front of the connection card as you feel comfortable sharing. Then as you work your way down the card, be sure to check that box that says 'first or second time guest.' At the bottom of the card you'll notice a question: 'How did you hear about The Journey Church?' We'd love to know how you heard. Maybe a friend invited you, you could write their name right there. Maybe you got something in the mail. Maybe you saw our church driving by. Whatever it is, we would love to know how you, as a first time guest, heard about our church."

That is just a portion of a longer welcome script that we use to get everyone to fill out their card. In fact, in the assimilation coaching we have an entire session on how to effectively use the communication card both in the opening hosting at your church, as well as in the collection of the cards at the end of your worship service and both of those are very important. I would encourage you to study those scripts. I would encourage those of you that are teaching pastors, or you do the hosting or welcome on Sunday, to take this script in its entirety, word-for-word and learn it and use it inside of your church and as you do you can get to the point where everyone complete a card every week.

You'll see 70%, 80%, or even 90% of your church, over time, fill out the card every week. If you think about it, if everyone's filling out their card it makes it comfortable for your first time guest to fill out the card. If you use that script the way that I've given you, the first part of that script encourages the regular attenders and members to fill out their card. At that point, your first time guest may still be just a little uncomfortable about giving you their information, but they look around and everybody in the church is filling out their card so, through positive peer-pressure, they begin to fill out their card as well.

Then, using my script from your stage or from the pulpit, you create a comfortable environment where people can share, if you remember those words, "as much information as you feel comfortable sharing." We've tested this over and over and over and what you have is the exact script that we use at our church and I've used to coach many other churches.

This is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to how to use the connection card and I go into a lot more detail in the assimilation coaching, but if you get the idea of everyone completes a card each week and try that connection card script to make that work inside of your church.

So, we're looking at during the service: a connection card. Everyone completes the card every week. Then number two, everyone places the card in with the offering. You want to think about now how you're going to collect the connection cards. Generally speaking, we have everyone complete the connection cards 15 to 20 minutes into the service then perhaps there's some additional music and then the sermon itself and then at the end of the service we receive the offering.

Now, you may receive the offering in the middle or you may receive it at the end, and I would encourage you to think about when you receive the offering, not just for the sake of the offering but also for the sake of the connection card. Then, people can turn it in during the offering time. We will tell them, and you will see this in the opening connection card script and the closing connection card script, that we tell them to hold on to this card because you'll turn it in during the offering. Then, in closing script, we give them a two-minute warning to say, "In just a moment we're going to be receiving the offering so you turn this card in at that time."

Now, what's interesting about this is now a first time guest has something to give during the offering time, which again deals with another objection that first time guests have which is, "What do I do during the offering time?" They may choose to give and, by all means, if they choose to give they have the opportunity to do it, but even if they don't, they don't have to feel weird during that offering time because they turn in

their connection card. You've got to collect it anyway and it's much better to collect the card in the service when everybody is turning in the card than to say things like, "Bring this card to our guest table." I'm all for a guest table. We'll get to that in a few minutes, maybe even in our next session. I'm all for having a guest table, I'm all for giving a guest a free gift, but don't make it dependent on them bringing that card to the table because, again, most people want, but most will turn it in with the offering.

Everyone, including your regular attenders and members and your first time guest, they put the card in the offering. Now, for some of you this may mean that you need bigger offering receptacles. Maybe you need a basket or maybe you need a bucket instead of just a flat tray to receive the offering because now you're going to be receiving all of these connection cards. Be more on connection cards, next steps, and things like that when we get to second time guests.

For now, everyone completes a card; everyone places the card in with the offering. Then number three, everyone has a next step to take each week. Your regular attenders and members they have some next steps. Second time guests have some next steps. We'll deal with that in a later session, but for your first time guests they have a next step to take by filling out this card and they just might take some spiritual next steps on the back of the card.

The key point here that I want to raise is that you have to find an easy, comfortable way for people to share their information with you because if you don't receive it, if you don't get the information properly, then you're not going to be able to do any follow up. Review this connection card script. Use it exactly like I tell you to use it. Look at those samples that we have in with these files and practice it, practice it, practice it three, four, maybe even six months to get it into your culture. Then, you'll actually begin to realize later, that this is actually a spiritual growth tool because 90% or 99% of the people filling out the card are regular attenders and members. They're using this card in very profound spiritual ways, but it also helps you when it comes to your first time guest and then, of course, it helps you with your second time guest. That's during the service, your connection card.

Now, I want to also cover in this session what happens after the service. Now, they're still on site. The service has completed. They've filled out their connection card. They've turned in their connection card. Now, the service is dismissing and that takes us to C), which is post-service. Now, when it comes to post-service there's two areas you want to focus on. The first area is what I call "the free book." I want to encourage you to give every first time guest who comes to your church a free book. This is a book that you have selected to be most helpful to first time guests that come to your church.

So, remember, when a first time guest comes to your church for the first time they often come because they are in transition, they're in trouble, or they're under tension. So, what book would best fit that mind-set? What book would best help them? I prefer a book over say a free treat, like something you might eat, or a free t-shirt, like something you might wear. You can give that in addition to the book, but I want to give them something that, if they engage it, it will help them move forward spiritually. Perhaps even move to that place of trusting Jesus as their Savior and Lord, but definitely help them get a greater understanding about what God's doing in their life.

In fact, I love the book idea so much I wrote a book that's designed for this purpose. If you would like to use the book that I wrote based on over 3,000 first time guests' prayer requests and what I did is I looked at all these first time guests we had at The Journey. I took their top ten prayer requests for when they come to the church for the first time and then I wrote a book with ten chapters that address each of those top ten issues. What I found in my coaching network is, from around the world and across the United States, these are often the same prayer that your people have, your first time guests have when they come to your church.

I put that book in their hand and it's a substantial book. It's not a little flimsy book or something that looks like we only got it for free or printed it very cheaply. It's a quality book and over and over we hear that when people engage that book it moves them closer to Christ and it shares the gospel and it might even lead them to Christ. I like giving them a substantial book because it's a gift. It's a gift that you want them to keep. You want them to engage. It's a way for you to show an honor and respect for those first time guests. So, don't hesitate to spend \$5, \$6, \$7, even \$10 on a book that you can give to your first time guests.

Now, we put some cool stuff in with that book. We put a letter from me that drives them to a survey that we would like them to complete, which is the same survey that we use in follow up and you'll see that in future sessions. That letter thanks them for coming. That letter invites them to fill out a survey. Now again, they don't have to bring the connection card to the free book table to get it. They can just swing by the table and grab the book. It's on the honor system, but it's a very powerful way.

If you study that connection card script you'll notice in the final hosting we say, "Go ahead and drop your connection card in with the offering and then, by doing so, you can swing by the first time guest table on your way out and pick up this book by Pastor Nelson. So, this is a way to kind of say you give us this card with the offering and then that sort of qualifies you to go by and get the free book. Now, I will tell you the first few times you give away the free book probably all your members are going to go by there and get it, but just kind of see that as an investment in them. Over time, this book will be for your first time guests. It's a very powerful way to show your appreciation for those in attendance and if you want to put bread or a t-shirt or, like one church in Texas does, chips and salsa with the book then that would be just fine.

Put something in their hands as they leave. Don't make them have to have a conversation. Don't make them have to turn anything in. Just let them let take it and go if they like. Doesn't mean you won't have a greeter there. Doesn't mean you won't have someone there keeping the supply of the books fresh. It does mean that they can get it very quickly if they would like.

Now, a second area of post-service relates to the free book table, but this is just simply your guest table or your resource table. Almost every church has some kind of resource table. Maybe you've got previous messages and sermon series that were taught at the church. Maybe you've got a statement of beliefs. Maybe you've got other brochures that you've developed about the church. Well, in with all of this normal stuff that you have, think about the questions that first time guests might have. They might have questions about what you believe so, make sure on the guest table you have a statement of belief. They might have questions about what does it mean to be a Christian. So, I have a DVD on our guest table of a resource that I did called, "What Does It Mean to be a Christian?" Maybe they have questions about what kind of Bible do I need to use or how do I pray or why did you receive the Lord's supper in service or what do you believe about baptism. Church people have a lot of questions about a church so, as you learn what those questions are, you develop resources at that table.

Now, one of the most common things that first time guests may want to take from a resource table is previous sermon series. Perhaps they enjoyed the sermon today and they want to get a series that you did a while back about being a good parent or about managing their money or getting out of debt, drawing close to God, studying the Bible, whatever it is. So, you have those resources out and, by all means, be generous with those resources. If someone can make a donation for that, that's fine, but if a first time guest ask about a resource and then you tell them, "It's a \$5 donation," and they start to walk away, train your greeters to say, "But you know, as our guest or as a gift to you, I want to just go ahead and give you this resource." That creates a culture of generosity, but also just a great, welcoming culture inside of your church.

So, post-service, two areas: the free book, for information about mine you can see that in the resources along with this seminar but make sure it's a nice, quality book that your first time guests can engage and move

forward spiritually; then also, this guest table. In this session we've moved them from the seat through the service, filling out their connection card, to after the service, getting their free gift, getting any question they have about the church answered, and now they're back in their car and they're heading home. They didn't leave you empty-handed. They left you with this connection card.

In our next session, what we're going to do is we're going to look at how do you handle these connection cards? How do you follow up? So, to start you thinking about that at the end of the service, while everyone is leaving, when you have your counters going through the offering, sorting out the offering, counting the offering, they're putting the offering in one stack and they're putting the connection cards in another stack.

Then, we have a separate set of data entry people who are taking those connection cards, they're sorting them, putting the first time guests on top followed by the new believers because we like to follow up with those new believers as quickly as possible as well, and that again gets into the evangelism seminar. Then, we have second time guests and then we get into regular attenders and members. As quickly as possible, we want to get the connection cards on our first and second time guests and we want to get them into our follow up process.

I have a very specific follow up process that I want to teach you in the next session and this is really going to help you. It's going to be a little thing that you can do that will have the big impact on your church. So, I'll see you back in the next session for follow up.

UPDATED AND EXPANDED:

**THE NEW
ASSIMILATION
SEMINAR**



**AN EFFECTIVE
FOLLOW-UP
PROCESS IN
FOUR EASY STEPS**

Nelson: Okay. Welcome back. We're talking about first time guests. Now, this is the last session that we're going to do on first time guest. It is slightly shorter than the others because I want at the end of this session for you to review all that we've talked about.

Because we started by trying to get into the mind of a first time guest and what is going on in their life on a Saturday night or a Sunday morning before they come to church. Then we looked at how to move them from the street to the seat in those four areas of greeted, directed treated, and seated. Last time, we got into what happens during the service, and we looked at that all important connection card. We're going to pick back up with that connection card in this session.

But we also looked at what happens as they walk out of the service. And hopefully by now, you've got your free book in place, something that you're giving your first time guest. You're studying that connection card script. You've thought through that resource area and what needs to be there in order to provide that welcoming environment and answer the questions of your first time guest.

Now in this session, what we want to look at is, "Okay. What happens post-weekend?" So, you now have these connection cards. You've sorted through and you've pulled out your first time guest cards and you want to handle those properly. In fact I want you to see every first time guest as a gift from God, and how can you treat that gift appropriately.

So what I want to give you in your notes is a follow up process. So if you see, post-weekend we're focusing on follow up. Sunday afternoon or Monday, you want to start this follow up process. Let me give you four thoughts on follow up.

Number one: Build a first response team. This is a team of people that will help you in doing this follow up, because you got data entry to do. You want to take these cards and you want to put them into your church database software and for recommendations on church software, say the resources that go along with this seminar. Now at first, you may be the first response team. For many years at the journey, I was the first response team. Then I had somebody out to helped me with that. An office manager and then eventually another pastor.

But then over time, we did build a volunteer team that would help in a lot of these areas that we're going to talk about. But for now maybe it's just you, but as we build through the system and build through this process that we're looking at, perhaps you can recruit other people to help you along the way. But you want to build that first response team.

The first response team does a lot of important work. One of the most important things that they do is they pray for each of your first time guests. If you remember, I talked about that sort of spiritual creativity that you might have. You've got a first time guest card and you look at their name. You look at where they might live. You look at their occupation. Look at how they heard. You look at if you have a husband's card and wife's card that goes together. Or maybe you've got a children's checking card on someone. And you begin to pray for that family, or pray for that person. Maybe they literally shared a prayer request with you on the back of that connection card.

One of the key spiritual elements to the first response team is prayer. And then there are elements that you want to use that team or you want to do personally. The first thing you want to do as a first response team is actually the second area of follow up. So, number two is 36 hour follow up via email. 36 hour follow up via email. Now, you'll notice the precision of this. Within 36 hours of their first attendance at the journey, I want to send them an email. Everybody has an email now, and they've been saying for years that email is going to

go away but we still see that, you know young and old, they all have emails. It's just a requirement in our day. Almost as much as having a phone number. You got to have an email address.

One of the easy and convenient, and non-imposing ways that you can follow up with someone is get the email address from the connection card, and send your first time guest an email. For me, this is a very simple email. People love short emails anyway. But it's, "Hey Jose! Thank you so much for being at the Journey on Sunday. I hope you had a great experience. I want to let you know that we'll be praying for you this week, and we want you to come back. P.S. In a couple of days I have a meeting to talk about how things went on Sunday. I would love if you would complete this 30-second survey. Click this link below."

In that email, I not only thanked them for coming, I invite them back. I might say something personal if they shared a prayer request, or if I know if it's a husband and wife. Or if I know they had someone in our Kid's Ministry, I do a little research about the person before I send them the email. But one of the key elements of that email is I drive them to fill out what we call a 30-second survey. This is a web link. If you remember I told you in with the free book that we give, basically is the same email in a letter form, more generic of course because I don't know their names at that time. But also in that free book is a flyer asking them to go complete the 30-second survey.

Sometimes I find that someone doesn't thought a connection card on Sunday, but they still take the free book, which I allow. I'm fine to give away the free books. We're not checking IDs or checking connection cards against the free book. Sometimes they'll fill out the survey even if they don't thought the connection card. Then, I will get their information from the survey.

But in this case, I got their card, and I'm now asking them to fill out the survey. Now we have samples of those surveys and with the resources. Just look for the first time guest survey. But I can tell you it's very simple. It ask for their confirmation of their name and their email. It asks for some basic contact info, very simple. Then we ask, what did you notice first? What did you like best? Over-all impression? And how can we pray for you? Basically, that survey has been the same over and over and over because I've just not been able to improve on it.

You'll notice I don't ask, what did you not like? There's no reason to ask for that. If something went terribly wrong, they would tell you an over-all impression. But I don't want them to be nitpick. I don't want them to reinforce any minor thing that may have gone wrong, plus I found that if someone is not a regular church attender, they don't really know how to give feedback. So that question may even lead to they're not filling out the survey.

But what did you notice first? We notice how clean the parking lot was. We noticed the friendly greeters. We noticed the person who welcomed us at the children's check-in. What did you like best? We really like the music, or when I teach they always say, "The teacher was so great, and profound, and full of wisdom." Well, they hardly ever talk about the teaching honestly, it's usually about the music. Then, what was your over-all impression? Oh we liked it. We've been looking for a church. We want to come back. How can we pray for you?

Sometimes in that survey question, they will tell you some of the most serious personal prayer request that you can imagine. Pray for us. This is our last hope before we go to divorce court. Pray for me I'm dealing with a loss of a mother. I took care of her for the last decade, and I just don't know what to do now that she's gone.

You wouldn't think on a small survey like that, that someone would share these intimate prayer requests. But

many times, people do. What that does is that gives me now an open door to be pastor, to serve them in a way that goes beyond just that first time attendance. Then when I get those surveys back, I may choose to call. I may choose to arrange an appointment or whatever might be needed, but if nothing else, they take a step of engagement telling me about their experience and I do all of that through that email.

But I send out the email, and I would say, ten percent of the time, I'll even get a reply to that email. More and more today people don't reply per se to emails, but I'll see the surveys come in. Some people will write back. I also put a little personal note in the email about who I am and may be some fun stuff about my life. Sometimes, they'll write back. So, we have children of the same age. Or, I know somebody who went to that school. And you'll see samples of those emails in with the resources, and you could take that and build your own email. But 36 hours, that must go out within 36 hours. I drive that, I watch it. I hold our staff accountable to that standard.

Then number three is a 96-hour follow up via mail. Post if you will. Snail mail I guess they call it. So, in addition to sending the email, we also send a follow up note to every person who attends. Now, this note also includes a link to the survey, but here's the catch. It's not a form letter. It's not even a letter. It is a personalized hand-written note.

So adding to this, I went out and bought some personal size stationery that you would find in a stationery store or a large discount store, and I bought 25 or 50 little personal envelopes, or little personal notes. And, I literally hand write a note to every first time guest. So this time, "Dear Jose, Thanks for being my guest at the Journey on Sunday. I hope you had a wonderful experience. I've enclosed a small gift as a token of my appreciation. Hope to see you back soon, Nelson." These letters go out under the signature written by the person who spoke on Sunday, unless I might have a guest speaker. But, you as the primary pastor or me as the primary pastor, we write these letters, and they go out every week.

There is tremendous power in the hand written note. I want to seriously challenge you to send a hand written note to every first time guest. Of all the things that I talk about in the assimilation seminar, the feedback I hear over and over is, when we started doing the hand written notes, everything changed.

Now, a hand written note is very powerful in any culture. No matter where you are in the world, the hand written note is powerful. But in worlds that have gone more high tech, like we have here in the United States, we've gone high tech, and we have social media and we have our phones, and we live our lives online. As the world has gone more high tech, certainly you want to use that. Use email. Have them connect with you on social media. Do everything that you can. In step number 2, email and beyond. Don't ignore email, but do email whatever what you want to do it.

But don't miss, here in number three, this high touch element. You see as the world has gone more high tech, you also want to go more high touch. Less and less are people receiving things in the mail. So, when you show up where no one else is showing up, with a hand written note, with a live stamp in their mailbox, written clearly by you, with a little gift inside, and I'll get to that. You really stand out.

I hear from people all the time on a Sunday, "I got your note last week. You're the first person that has written me a hand written card since my birthday." Or sometimes I hear, "I didn't get a birthday card this year. I just got that hand written note from you." So this hand written note is powerful. I would just dare say that if you are not willing to write the hand written notes, you are not in the position where God can trust you with more first time guests.

I've had people tell me, "We have five first time guest a week. You really mean it. I'm supposed to write five

hand written notes?" Yes! 5, 15, 50. Sometimes I start writing them late in the week for the following Sunday. I don't put the name on it yet, but basically what I write is the same. So, all I have to do is go in there and put the dear and the salutation. Then put the name on the envelope. If you walk into my office you'll see boxes sometimes of hand written notes that I've written during down time, or written while waiting on appointments. Sometimes, I've been known to carry those with me on a trip, and write them on a flight.

I was filling out, one time on a flight, and somebody asked me across the seat, "Did you just get married? Are you writing thank you notes for wedding?" No! It's more important than that. These are first time guests. So, you really should, must, have to, whatever it is, you've got to write these hand written notes.

The hand written note is what I called the keystone habit of the assimilation system. If you're willing to do this one little thing, then you're going to find amazing blessing and provision from God for all the other areas that we have talked about, and all the future areas that we will talk about. So, I'm a fan, as you can tell, of the hand written note, and you will be too. The feedback will be so phenomenal that you'll never stop doing the hand written notes.

Now, you may have heard me mention that I put a gift inside the hand written notes. It's a \$5 gift card. You can choose what the gift card might be. In our locations where people drive cars to the church, we give them a \$5 gas card. I think that's a very appropriate gift. Everybody uses gas, it's symbolically says, "We will pay for your gas to come back to our church for the second time." Some of our urban areas, we might give a subway pass or a bus pass. Basically the same idea, we'll pay for you to come back for your second visit. Did I say visit? Okay. I guess visit is okay. It's visitor that's bad.

But, other places sometimes people get restaurant card, where they get coffee card, or different things. I like something very basic, like a gas card, and I would encourage you to test out different options. Because it has to be something that's very available and something that they would use. If you give them a very unique gift card to perhaps a dessert place or a restaurant, then they never get around to using it. But I want them to use that gas card. I want them put it in their car and be reminded that was from the church, and they care about me, and build that link in their mind back to our church.

So, this goes in the mail, 96 hours after their first visit. The email will often go out on Monday, or often go on Tuesday morning. Then I always get the letter in the mail by Tuesday afternoon and then it will arrive in people's mailbox, literally by Wednesday or definitely no later than Thursday. So, there's power in these hand written notes.

The only objection I ever really hear beyond, "Do you really want me to write all of these notes?" And that's a minor objection. The only objection I ever hear about this is, well, there's a cost involved. There's a stamp, there's some stationery involved. The card, it's \$5. You want me to spend \$5? But first of all, I don't want you to spend \$5. I want you to think of it as an investment in that person that has come to your church. You're investing in them.

You see, God's doing something in their life. They may have seen your ads. They may have seen your signage. They may have invited by a friend. You've already made an investment to get them there for the first time. Now, make a second investment to get them back a second time.

You know, we found in just doing some surveys that you may spend a \$100, \$200, or even more to get someone there for the first time. That's the investment you make in evangelism. Then, I'm saying, you should also invest another \$5 or \$7, or whatever the total cost of this little package might be, to get them to return. It's an investment in them. It's a thank you note for this gift that God has sent to you. So, you build the team.

You did 36 hour follow up via email. The team can help you send out those emails. You do the 96 hour follow up via mail. You write the hand written notes. Maybe they put the cards in, they mail it, stamp it. Take it to the post office.

Then number four, you do a one month follow up. You can do this via mail or email, or my preferred way would be both. This is just a letter that you might send them one month after their first time attendance at your church. Acknowledging that it's been a month. Acknowledging that you hope they've gotten connected, giving them some invites about upcoming events that you have, or an upcoming sermon series, or teaching series that you're doing. It's just one little last step in case they haven't come back.

Now, if they come back, and they become a second time guest, well, we'll get to that in our next session. But if thirty days after their first visit, they're still listed in your database as a first time guest, then you would at least do one more thing to try to get them back. You can see some samples about this. If you can't do number four, I don't think it's nearly as important as the first three. Along the way, let me just remind you, continue to pray. Think about ways that you can wow your first time guest. Wow them with the hand written note. Wow them with the gift card. Wow them with the one-month contact, and whatever it might be.

But remember if you're faithful with the few, you will be entrusted with more. You may only have one first time guest a week. Well, make sure 36-hour follow up happen, 96-hour follow up happens, 1-month follow up happens. Be faithful with that one. You may have noticed there's a few things that I didn't mention. For example, I didn't mention phone calls. I'm not a big fan of phone calls to your first time guest. I do think it's appropriate for you to make phone calls to the first time parents, through checking their children at your kid's church, or children's church.

In essence, you could take the same follow up process that we've been building here, and layer it on to your student ministry, and layer it on to your kid's ministry and adjust as appropriately. That's what we've done. But calling first time guest, I found, unless they have a serious prayer request that demands a pastoral connection, in often times just pushes people away. Sometimes, kind of freaks people out. You know, what is the pastor doing calling me? I don't know how to talk to a pastor. I don't know what to do.

This is the minimum that I would do, email and mail. If you want to do something else, then test it. If you want to do something else on social media, test it and see if it works. If you want to make a few phone calls to see what kind of response that you get, test it and see if it works. But I can assure you that the basic email follow up, the hand written note, those things work and they will be the best return on your limited time and resources. I want the response to be fast. I want people to feel like we noticed.

Now, I'm also a realist and I know that even though I do this quick follow up, they may not come back the next week. In fact, if they're un-church, they may not come back for two or three weeks or even six or eight weeks, But I still want to do this follow up, and I want to do the best that I can.

As we end this session, there's a lot for you to think about. In fact, you noticed as I told you, we have invested a significant portion of time on first time guest. Now, what you will discover as we go into our future sessions is a lot of the seeds that I planted here in first time guest will allow us to cover second time guest quicker, and then allow us to cover regular attenders and members much quicker.

So by getting this right, by getting first contact right, by getting during the service right, by getting post-service right, by getting post-weekend right, it has a tremendous impact on whether or not your first time guest will return. But, the very same systems and processes that you build here can be layered over in the second time guest, and they have a profound impact on moving people from regular attenders to members.

So, we're going to pick up with second time guest in the next section. But, I want you to take some time in your teams now to think about your first time guest process. What are some changes you need to make? What are some changes you discussed three sessions back that you are going to make? Have you prayed for your first time guest? Is there someone you need to invite on the team? Decide now, to go out and pick up those first time guest stationary and those stamps that you need to start hand writing. Maybe you need to make some database changes. I don't know what it might be, but there's a lot of areas for discussion in this first time guest area. If you get this foundation right, you'll be able to build, build, and build, like we're going to do in future sessions.

So, let me leave you with this verse. I've eluded to it a number of times. It's Matthew 25, Jesus said, "Well done good and faithful servant. You've been faithful with a few things. I will put you in charge of many." You have been faithful with your few first time guests, maybe God says I will entrust you with more. If you take care of your first time guest, there's a greater likelihood they're going to come back, and second time guests are probably the single greatest indicator of health and growth inside of your church. But that is for our next session.

UPDATED AND EXPANDED:

**THE NEW
ASSIMILATION
SEMINAR**



**CONNECTING
SECOND-TIME
GUESTS**

Nelson: Welcome back! In this session, we're going to talk about the all-important second time guest. So, think about what we've done so far in these sessions. We've laid a solid foundation for our first time guest. By doing that, by investing the time that we have in first time guests, we are set to talk about and retain second time guests.

So, we did all of that work to get someone to go from first time guests to second time guests. Now, they've come back. That is the key hurdle that you have in the assimilation seminar. The most important step in all of this process is to get someone to come back for a second time.

Now, second time guests are extremely important, because someone not only made a decision to come once, and they may make a decision to come once because they're just honoring a friend, because a relative said please come, or because they really had a one-time need. But if someone comes back a second time, that shows a greater level of seriousness. It shows a greater level of spirituality in their life. It shows that God is really doing something. In essence, second time guests are more important than first time guests. The number of second time guests that you have coming to your church is a greater indication of the future health of your church, and the future growth of your church.

We just think about a restaurant for example. A lot of people would go to a restaurant just to check it out for the first time. But it's those people who come back and come back again, and come back again. Those are the ones who really like that restaurant. Those are the ones who are going to commit to that restaurant. People check things out for the first time for a lot of different reasons. You should take those reasons seriously and do all the work that we've talked about so far. But then when they come back a second time, now that shows you that there's real potential to help this person and to move them along the path from second time guests to regular attendee, regular attendee to fully engaged member.

Second time guests are more important than first time guests. But there's more to do when it comes to first time guests, but here's also the key. Everything that you did for your first time guests, also benefits your second time guests. So I'm actually going to be able to teach you in one session the steps in moving someone from first time guests to second time guests, because so much of what we covered in the previous sessions impacts second time guests.

You'll notice in your notes, I'm going to jump straight into during the service. When it comes to second time guests, I don't need to go back and cover from the street to the seat, the four areas of first contact. I don't need to talk about any of that because if you're doing that well for your first time guests, then it's going to help your second time guests. By the way, if you're far enough into the implementation process, and you've already made some of those changes that we've talked about in your church when it comes to your parking lot, or when it comes to your greeters, you're probably already getting positive feedback from your members.

Because think about that. All the things that you do to create a welcoming environment for your first time guests, they also benefit those who attend every week. So, maybe they're noticing the change in landscape. Maybe they're noticing your follow up is getting better when it comes to prayer request and things like that. All the changes that we've made so far have a compounding effect. Now, we can move straight to during the service.

When a second time guest comes to your church, the number one thing you want from them during the service is the connection card. You saw that coming, right? You knew I was going to say connection card. You just as you want a first time guest to thought their connection card, you also want to get a second time guest to thought of the connection card. You will use the same connection card script. You will use

the same process. Get your members and your regular attenders to fill out the card first. Have your first and second time guests fill out the card, have them mark that they are first or second time guests. All that we've talked about so far.

Here's the difference. When it comes to second time guests, we want to look at not just the front of the card, like we did with first time guests. But we really want to look at the back of the card. Because first time guests, they may or may not check a lot of next steps on the back of your card. Now, it's very likely they would share a prayer request, it is very likely that if you peak their interest about something, they may sign up. But we really want to focus on helping second time guests take next steps.

Now, if you look at my sample connection card, you'll notice on the back of the card, it's divided into two areas. What I would call the major left hand side, and the smaller right hand side. It's smaller on the right hand side, but it still very important. So, I'm not going to call it minor. I'm just going to say smaller. But the major left hand side of our card, by large, those next steps are customized to that week's message.

If you add a size and you have the ability in your church to customize the left hand side to your message, by all means. But if you can't, you may think of the left hand side as the key next steps that you want to offer people every week. Next steps like becoming a follower of Jesus. Learning more about membership. Learning more about small groups. Learning more about the church. Then of course you'll notice this is also where we do the sign-ups for our small groups, and we have the every present prayer request line.

Because second time guests have come back. They have greater needs. They may be more willing to share prayer request. But then on the smaller right hand side, we have a whole bunch of next steps that people can take. Everything from spiritual next steps like becoming a Christian and baptism, to a specific fun events that they may sign up for. But here, you really want to help out your second time guests get plugged in and you're measuring it assets the health of your second time guests area by how many second time guests take next step.

So, think about that when you're talking. Think about that when you're developing flyers or you're promoting different things that are going on. You can get second time guests involved in a lot of ways and before we leave this session, I'm going to show you three key ways that you can engage second time guests on the connection card. But just remember, the connection card matters for everybody. First time guests, second time guests, regular attenders and members, but for the second time guests, it's the back that is most important. So, we want to get the second time guests to complete a connection card, hopefully takes the next steps.

Once they do that, then we move into the follow up. That's the next area of moving second time guests to regular attenders. Just as you follow up on your first time guests, you also want to follow up on your second time guests. Now, this fill ins in your note are going to look very similar because it is similar.

The first follow up point with your second time guests is a 36-hour follow up via email. Within 36 hours of a second time guests, filling out a connection card, you want to send them a follow up. Now this follow up is in some ways similar to the follow up you did with first time guests. It's "Dear first name," or "Dear first husband and wife," whatever the case might be. You thank them for coming back second time. You can even have a second time guests survey and we have that and you can see samples of that in your resource guide. So, a second time guests survey.

But what you really focusing on in this email, is challenging them to take some next steps. So in essence, you're customizing this email to the next connection of that you have in your church. Maybe it's going to

be a fun event that you're doing as a church. Maybe something at the church property or something off the church property. I'll show you a little bit more about that later. Maybe it's an opportunity for them to sign up for a group. If you know something about them, maybe you want to tell them about the different groups that are going on in your church. Or if you use the small group system, like I teach and you do the semester base small groups, and it's time for them to sign up, you can go ahead and tell them how they can sign up for a group. Or, if you're not having sign ups, you can say in a month, you're going to be able to sign up for these groups. Or, maybe you're telling them about the next membership class or about the next baptism. But this is an email that the bones of it stay the same. But then the skin is a little different each week based on the upcoming events, because what you're trying to do here, is you're trying to get second time guests to take a next step where they can now start building relationships inside the church. So, you want to get them around members of the church. You want to get them serving in your church. You want to get them to go to events at the church. You want to move them to somewhere that they can be known by other people, and that they can know other people. In that email, you're customizing that according to what's going on in your church. So, 36-hour follow up via email, basic bones of the email, has a second time guests survey, and then specific events that you are promoting against samples in your resource.

The second area of follow up is, as you might imagine, a 96-hour follow up via mail. This time, we're once again putting a letter in the mail to our second time guests. In this case, I don't necessarily think it has to be a hand written note. You're welcome to do that. You're welcome to put this one on a business size envelope and maybe just hand addressed the outside of the envelope. But again, it's not a form letter. It is a letter that you customize each week, knowing that certain paragraphs might be the same, but again you're changing out the dates for upcoming events. You're challenging them to get connected in some way that you're relevant based on the season and life of your church. We have some samples of that. You might also give them a link to that survey, something very simple like your church website/survey2 for your second time guests.

But I also include in this letter a second gift. Now, one of the things I've learned is, whatever you reward will get repeated. That which gets rewarded, gets repeated as how I often say it. So, you rewarded your first time guests for coming by giving them that initial gift card. Now they come back and they say, "You know, I better fill out that connection card, because the last time I filled out that connection card, I got the gas card or whatever it is you sent them in that first time note." So, they thought again, so now you want to reward them. Reward them for filling out their connection card the second time, and I send them a second gift.

In the first time letter, they often get something very basic, like a gas card or a subway or bus pass. In the second time letter, I might give them something a little more fun, like a gift certificate to a local ice cream place or a gift certificate to some family oriented type place. Again, \$5 where they can go and get a cone of ice cream, or get a soda, or whatever the case might be. But it's something fun and I reward them.

In fact, sometimes I think I reward them so much, that even though I don't have a third time guests box on my connection card, they will sometimes write it in, hoping that there might be a secret third time guests gift. But there's not, there's only a second time guests gift. But there's a letter, a letter that is customized based on upcoming events in the church, a letter that has the survey, a letter that has the gift, and you do the follow up.

Now, as you're doing this follow up, remember prayer is so very important. In fact, the prayer for your second time guests should, if there's such a thing, take a higher priority, because they have come back. Maybe with your second time guests, you don't just pray for them once that week. You pray for them many times over the course of the week, because they have come back. There's clearly something going on in their life that says, there's potential here. There's opportunities to really minister in opportunities to see the life

transformation, which remember that's what this is all about. Life transformation in the lives of these people. So, we follow up with them,

Now, let's talk about connection opportunities, and that's letter C. Connection opportunities. When someone comes for the second time, they're showing interest in your church. Part of what you want to do, is help them get connected through different opportunities. So, you're talking about these connection opportunities on a Sunday and you have sign-ups for those next steps on the back of your connection card. You're talking about these connection opportunities in your email, and in your mail package that you're sending them.

But what kind of connection opportunities are they? What are the best connection opportunities for second time guests? Well there's really three.

The first connection opportunity is small groups. It's not uncommon for a second time guests to sign up for a small group. Now, whether you're a church that does Sunday school, or you do sermon base small groups, or decentralize small groups, or stress and release small groups, or semester base small groups, whatever it is that we call these, and I have an entire seminar on how to maximize your small groups, how to activate really your small groups and keep those humming along at 90 to 110% adult participation. But whatever type of small group that you have at your church, you want to try to move second time guests into a small group.

In essence, if a second time guests joins and fully engage as a small group, they are assimilated in your church. Now, in my assimilation seminar, it sorts of ends with membership. But we know realistically if a second time guests gets into a group, they continue to be faithful to that group. They continue to attend. Even if they don't go to your membership class for a year or two, they are connected. They have stuck, and you want to create stickiness in the second time guests. So, you want to get them to stick, you know. You got them to return, now you want to build relationships and you want these sticking points in the church, this connection opportunities and small groups are very powerful.

That's one of the reasons why a growing church is always offering new small groups. So, one of the things you may have to do, is you have more and more first time guests come in to your church as open up additional small group units. So that you can stay ahead of the growth. Again, you can see my small groups seminar for some specific ways on how to do that, have a healthy ever growing, reproducing small groups.

But a second sticking point or connection point in our language is fun events. Fun events or one-time events that second time and really anybody in the church can come to, and they can just have fun together. They can have fun with other Christians in the church, it's really all about fellowship. It's all about relationship. It's all about fun.

A lot of churches miss out on opportunities to connect new people by not having enough fun events. How do you think about this? Well, you can just create fun events. You can do a fun night at the church, maybe do a game night at the church. I'm bad at this so we can't do cards, but we can do a game night at the church. You can just create something. Or there's a lot of things people in your community, and this is really where I focus, there's a lot of things that people in your community are going to do anyway, so why not make it a church event. Maybe there's a big movie that's coming out, and it's a very family-friendly movie. So, why not say, "Let's go to that together." We'll all go to the movie, then afterwards, we'll go to dinner. We'll go to dinner and we go to the movie. Or we go to the movie and then go out for yogurt or whatever after the service.

It's something that people are going to do anyway, but they could do it with one another. Build a deeper fellowship inside the church, but also it can be a connecting point for the second time guests. I can tell you

personally. I lead a lot of these fun events, cause I figure if I'm going, I might as well go with other people. There's rarely a fun event that a second time guests doesn't show up for. In fact, when I plan these fun events, not only do I invite the church, but I may go back in the database three months or two months, and pool all the second time guests and send them a specific invite to this dinner or this night in the park, or this night at the movies.

Then another type of fun event is maybe there's something really big going on in the community, like a parade or like a July 4th firework show, or whatever it might be. Ending up people are going to go down, they're going to take blankets and picnics, and they're going to sit outside. Well, let's make an area for our church. Let's all meet at the corner of Main Street and 1st, and walk over together, and really sit together and experience this fun event together.

You may need to think of some fun events, and we work really hard, especially when our groups are not meeting. We do semester base groups, so there's a few months a year that our groups aren't meeting, and we really try to put these fun events in our calendar so that we can get these second time guests connected. We're also very strategic about having a number of fun events after what we call our big days. So, you know on Easter, you're going to have a lot of first time guests, where you hope to get them back. So, two or three weeks after Easter, make sure you have a number of fun events and on down the line, we could go. But small groups, fun events, and this one may surprise you just a little bit. Hopefully it doesn't wreck your Theology. But number three is service teams.

Service teams. You want to promote to your second time guests opportunities for them to start serving in the church. You may say, "Well, should I even ask this? I mean is it okay to ask second time guests to serve?" I mean you may be thinking, I don't even know if they're a believer yet, much less should they be serving. But let me just remind you about the power of service.

Second time guests should be asked to serve because it gives them a purpose. A lot of times people are coming back to church, because they don't feel like they have a purpose. They don't feel like they're making a difference. They're not finding the significance in their life. Or, they just gone through some kind of trouble, transition, or tension, and they want to do something else. They want to have something positive in their life.

So, when you ask second time guests to serve, you're really helping them discover their purpose. Not to mention the fact that you're helping them develop friendships, because there's very few areas in your church where you can serve alone. So, if a second time guests serves in a parking lot, or the second time guests serves at a resource table or the second time guests comes to volunteer at the church office. They're building connections. They're building relationships with people. That can be very profound when it comes to their own spiritual growth.

So, there are areas at the Journey church where people can serve without even being a believer yet. I go into more detail on that in a seminar that I have called, "The Ministry Seminar", which is about volunteers and building a volunteer culture inside of your church. But there are, just so you know, areas where a non-believer cannot serve. You know, they're not going to serve on the worship team. They're not going to probably serve as an offering collector, they're not going to serve in kids. Nobody serves in our kid's ministry without a background check.

There's areas where you have to be a believer, you even have to be a member to serve. But, we've also created a lot of areas where second time guests, and very new people to our church, new regular attenders can serve because I believe, this helps them belong. It helps them rub shoulders with Christians. It helps move them forward in their spiritual life transformation process. So, Jesus said, "For even the Son of Man

came not to be served, but to serve others," in Mark chapter 10, verse 45. So, we want to help these second time guests serve.

They build relationships. They find purpose. Another reason you may want to ask a second time guests to serve is that it begins to give them a personal sense of ownership in the church. That ownership is very important. In fact, as someone moves from second time guests, to regular attender, you're looking for them to take ownership. They take ownership of a serving area. They take ownership inside the church to do something or to participate, or to sign-up for something inside the church, like small groups or fun events, or service teams.

Really, as we'll see in the next session that ownership precedes membership. Before someone officially signs on the dotted line to become a member, they join in their heart. You know, you'll see that as people invest their time and invest their talent inside the church, then this becomes their church. Not just the church they go to, but it becomes their church.

Think about second time guests, you want to follow up with it, you want to get that connection card. You want to follow up on that connection card, and then you want to create sticky points, connection points so that they stay. The more sticky you can make your church, the more likely it is for your second time guests to stay. Second time guests are very important.

Why don't you take some time right now to think about how you're doing when it comes to second time guests. Maybe go back and review your connection card to make sure that second time guests are on the connection card, to make sure that during your hosting time, you're talking to your second time guests. To make sure that you are praying for your second time guests, not only the day you did the follow up, but perhaps, at multiple points throughout the day. And then to make sure that you've got stickiness, that you've got enough events scheduled, that you have enough small groups for the second time guests, and that you've got places where they can serve.

I love second time guests. The second time guests in your church are the greatest indicator of the future growth, and the future health of your church. So, go above and beyond and let God speak to you about what you can do in this area to take care of not only those gifts that have come for the first time, but now they've come back. And they've seen something in your church that draws them back. And now let's cooperate with God and let's see how he's going to draw them to Himself, because someone comes back for a second time. Maybe on the third time or the fourth time, they become a follower of Jesus, and then they want to move forward in Baptism. And move forward in their family that they found at your church.

So, we're going to pick this up next time, by talking about regular attenders. We get those second time guests to stick, and now we want to help normalize their attendance, and move them into membership. So, that's what we're going to look at next time. I'll see you back then.

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FULLY-ENGAGED
MEMBER**

Nelson: Congratulations! You have made it this far in the seminar. I'm so proud of you. The work that we've done in these sessions have been incredible. They can be church transforming, and I hope you're beginning to sense that and feel that in your church. Maybe even now, just this far into it, you're beginning to see some of that transformation, and you're seeing first time guests come back. You're seeing second time guests take next steps, get involved in serving, and starting to grow. We've reached the point here, near the end of our time, where we're looking at: from regular attender to member.

Once a second time guest comes back for a third time, or comes back for a fourth time, or a fifth time, or a sixth time, they begin to identify your church as their church. At that point, they are a regular attender. One of the questions I get from time to time is, "Nelson, how do I know if someone is a regular attender?" The only true answer is, they self-identify. They self-identify.

Most people, after their third or fourth time at a church, they're starting to think of this as their church. They're starting to identify that, "When I go to church, I go there." They may not be the fully developing follower of Jesus that we want yet. In fact, they may not even be a believer yet, but they're attending. They're finding something at your church, and they're being drawn closer to God in such a way that they start thinking of themselves as a regular attender. Now, in this final step of assimilation, we want to move them from regular attender into the fully engaged member of your church.

Before I get into the techniques of that and give you a few scriptures, I want to go back to something that we started with. You may remember - or probably not because it was so long ago - in our first session, I reminded you that assimilation is really biblical hospitality. I want to remind you of the theology of hospitality for just a moment.

Now, here I'm not talking so much about the hospitality in your church, but I'm really talking about the great drama of hospitality that God works in the life of every believer. If you think about your life, there was a time before you were a believer where you were a stranger from God. You were out there running away from God. You were dead in your trespasses and sins. You were a stranger. Then, through God's Holy Spirit, He draws you to Himself, and you probably went to a church for the first time.

There, at that church, you became a guest. You weren't a member of God's family. You had not been adopted into God's family. You were just a guest. You were observing. You were open. You were, perhaps, experiencing the conviction of the Holy Spirit, this drawing in your life. Then, at some moment you said "yes" to Jesus Christ, and at that moment you were no longer a stranger. You were no longer a guest. When you said "yes" to Jesus Christ, and you stepped across that line of faith, you became a family member. You were now a brother and sister with every other follower of Jesus Christ.

I'm old enough to remember that in church we used to call one another brothers and sisters. We don't do that as much anymore, and maybe rightfully so, but we are family members. You're my brother in Christ. You're my sister in Christ, because God is our Father. Then, as we mature as a family member, we begin to understand who we are in connection with Christ - that we're not just a brother and sister in Christ, but we are co-heirs with Christ Jesus. That all that Jesus has, He gives to us as an inheritance. We have a place in heaven. We have a place in God's kingdom.

We begin to understand the fullness. We'll never understand it fully. We see through a dark glass dimly, but we begin to see all that we have in Christ. That sustains us and maintains us, and we persevere in Christ Jesus. Think about that progression: stranger, to guest, and then in Christ we become family members and co-heirs with Christ. That's the process God has worked in all of our lives, and in essence, this assimilation process that we've been going through, it is your way in the church to help facilitate that process in the lives

of individual people.

I believe God gives us that opportunity. We don't take God's work. We're not doing the work of God. We're still utterly dependent on God, but when God sends a guest to our house, let's make sure that they're treated well. Let's make sure we follow up on them. Let's see if we can get a first time guest to return. Then, let's do everything we can to connect them and create stickiness, so that as they attend on a regular basis, they understand who Jesus is and eventually take that step of faith to follow him.

Then, as they grow in this new family that they have, as a brother and sister in Christ, we want to help them understand all that they have in Jesus. God created the church as his family on Earth, and we have a role and a responsibility in the church to help each individual person God sends our way so that they can experience biblical hospitality locally, but also eternally.

I'll pause right there. There's a lot of verses that I could give you, and there's a few in your notes, like Romans 8:17 and Ephesians 1:5. Sometime or another you may want to do an entire study on biblical hospitality, and of course that bridges into biblical fellowship as well. I thought at this point - as we near the end of our time and this session, and then one brief final session to wrap up - I want to remind you of what God is doing through you, how God can work through you, and how I hope you're already seeing that.

In this step three, from regular attender to member – as we get into this, let me remind you of a few verses. First of all, we get to be a part of God's church, but it's ultimately His church. In fact, Jesus said in Matthew 16:18, "I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it." Then, in the book of Hebrews, we're admonished, "And let us not neglect our meeting together as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of His return is drawing near."

As we move into this last step, we want to encourage people who are regular attenders. They've gone from first time guests, second time guests, to regular attenders. We want to encourage those who are regular attenders to now move and become fully engaged members of our church.

Now, this is not a membership seminar. I have other resources on developing members and how to practically run a membership process. Every church does it a little differently. If I can help you, take a look at those other resources. The point is, we do want to see people move from just casual attenders to fully engaged member, and there is a difference. There is a difference between a regular attender and a member. It's often a difference that you notice in language before you notice it in deed or action.

Here's what I've noticed - and this is in your notes. A regular attender says, "This is the church I go to." Yes, it is the church they go to. They do feel a connection to the church, but when they talk to you, maybe as the pastor, they say, "Pastor, I love what you have going on here. Pastor, you have some good things going on here. Pastor, I like what all these people at the church do." They sort of see themselves as a little bit outside. Yes, they're attending. They may even be part of a group, or they may go to a lot of events, but they're just on the periphery of the church.

A regular attender says, "This is the church I go to," but a member, a member says, "This is my church." Even before they sign the membership covenant, you may notice the change in language. They don't say, "Pastor, I love what you have going on here." They say, "Pastor, I love what we do at our church. I'm so proud to be a part of this church. I can't believe all the good things that happen every week at our church. I was so excited to have a role in helping our church do this ministry, or in that ministry."

The language of ownership begins to occur, and long before someone signs up for membership they take

ownership in the church. In fact, so much so that I often say ownership precedes membership. When you're looking to move people into membership, all you need to do is look for those people who have taken ownership. They take ownership through their serving. They take ownership through their giving. They take ownership through their words and how they talk about their church - not the church they go to. "This is my church." You want to be on the lookout for that, and see that as a way God is working inside of someone's life.

Then, from a practical standpoint, how do you move someone into membership? How do you move them from being a regular attender to a fully engaged member? There's two ways you can do it. First of all, there's the opportunities that you have during the services. Let's talk about what you can do during the service to help someone move from regular attender to member.

Number one, you can challenge them to serve. You can provide serving opportunities. We talked about serving opportunities quite a bit when we looked at second time guests or regular attenders, because serving opportunities - more so than fun events, and even more so than being an attender in a small group - when someone takes on a label, or takes on a title in some kind of service area in your church, that means they're taking ownership. They're taking ownership. By now, perhaps, the regular attender has become a follower of Jesus, and there's really no area in the church that is off limits to them.

In fact, I'll caution you to make sure that you have plenty of opportunities in your church for non-members to serve. There are some things that only members can do, and only members should do, but a lot of things that we've traditionally put behind the membership covenant - these are serving opportunities that really don't require membership; they only require the commitment to attend regularly. For example, to be an usher in our church all you need to do is be a regular attender. To sing on our worship team for at least a semester or two, all you need to do is be a regular attender.

Now, after you've been serving for a while, we do want our volunteer leaders and our team leaders to have a conversation with you about becoming a member, but even at The Journey, you can lead a small group for at least one semester without yet being a member. Inside of our small group structure, you can be a small group host for a long time without being a member. You can be a small group coordinator, or you can be in charge of refreshments, or you can be in charge of the prayer request.

There's a lot of different areas where a regular attender can serve, and they can have significant ownership in the church. Again, the more ownership that you can give - the more little pieces of serving leadership, or serving ownership that you can give - the more pride someone's going to have in the church, the more responsibility they're going to take in the church, the more ownership they're going to have in the church. Ownership, again, precedes membership. Just as in the last session you looked at where are the serving opportunities for second time guests, now you want to ask, "Do I have enough serving opportunities for my regular attenders?"

One of the things I encourage churches to do - and I go into great detail in this in a seminar that I have called the Ministry Seminar, which is really about having a healthy volunteer culture - is to take the areas of service you have in your church and divide it into four. Either create four parts of service inside of that area, or create four teams that rotate in that area. If you shoot for four teams and you end up with three, that's okay. You shoot for four teams and you end up with two, that's okay, because even doing that you double the number of areas.

You want to look at and measure the health of your church by how many people do we have serving. The more regular attenders that you move into serving, the larger, if you will, the fishing pool for membership becomes. You want to get as many people ownership as possible. Now, you do this carefully. You do it with

job descriptions. You do it with timelines. All that I talk about in that other ministry seminar, but serving opportunities become very important.

People begin to take pride, and they begin to take ownership of their area. They now know that they matter. They're now not just on the outside looking in. They're an integral part of the church, and they're members through their serving before they sign that particular covenant, but that's a very, very powerful step. It not only facilitates them moving into membership, but it facilitates their spiritual growth.

This is a little outside of our seminar, but I have to say, the more people you have serving in your church, the more healthy your church is going to be, because serving leads to growth. Jesus said the goal of this Christian life is to learn to serve, to be a servant of many. The more people you have serving, the more people you have growing. The more regular attenders you have serving, the more likely you are to move them to membership.

Do you get the vision that I like seeing people serve? I want people to fulfill their God-given purpose in your church, and this helps in moving them in the direction we're going - to fully engaged member serving opportunities.

A second way during the service that you can move people from regular attender to member is to preach on membership. Preach on it. Sometimes I talk with churches - particularly when they join my coaching networks - and they say, "I have trouble getting people to join. We used to do membership class, but we stopped because nobody went to it," or they say, "I see value in membership class. I think it's good to bring people together for a couple hours and talk about the core values of the church and to talk about the vision of the church. I see value in having people sign a membership covenant."

I do, too. I'm a big believer in membership. I know you become a member of God's family when you're saved in Jesus Christ, but I also think you should commit to a local church and become a member of a local church. A lot of times when someone says, "I have trouble getting people to join my church," we begin to discover that they've never really taught their people why membership matters. If you're a teaching pastor, think about the last time you preached on membership.

One of the things I love about the connection card is, every week on the back of the connection card it has the date of the next membership class. Even if the next membership class is a few months away, at least it's there every week for people to sign up for and to see. Then, a lot of times, as we get closer to membership class, it moves from the smaller right-hand side of our connection card to the major left-hand side, and it becomes very specific. One of the things I use the connection card for is a way for people to sign up for membership class. We do single step sign-ups for membership class on the back of the connection card.

I might preach on membership, maybe an entire sermon, or more than likely, just a five or ten minute piece inside the sermon. If the text lends itself for me to say something about membership, or if I feel like that's a big spiritual need in the church and I need to preach on it, then I'll preach on it. Then I will call people's attention to the next step on the back of their connection card and say, "Take that step today to sign up for membership class." So, they sign up right there.

Some churches lack members because they don't preach on membership class enough, or when they do preach on it, there's no easy way for people to sign up. The pastor gets everybody excited, but then they have to go through a multiple step process to go to the class. They have to call the office, or fill out this form, or be pre-approved in some way, as if they're getting credit for a new home loan. I do single step sign-ups. I preach on it, and then they can sign up for it right there on the connection card.

By the way, it's the same process I use for baptism. If I preach on baptism, they can sign up for the next baptism right there on the card. If I'm talking about fellowship and fun events, they can sign up. If I'm talking about small groups, they can sign up. I love single step sign-ups, and that's just a reminder that your connection card is a very, very powerful tool beyond just first time guests. It's also the way people sign up. It's also the way people take spiritual next steps, like scripture memorization, baptism, or membership. It's also the way they sign up for groups or sign up for fun events.

You may lack in the area of membership because you've been slack when it comes to preaching on membership. Preach on it. Tell people why it matters. Way back, in an earlier session, I mentioned the 30 day follow-up to first time guests. I sort of said, "If you can't do everything, don't worry about it," but I will tell you that as we've developed our assimilation process - and if I told you the entire assimilation process that we use at The Journey, we would need 70 sessions to be able to go into that. In fact, it's one of the reasons I have a deeper course after this one called Assimilation Coaching, and I really take you deeper. We're just laying down the basic foundations here, but what I'm saying in there is, in each of the areas that we've already discussed I actually have other steps designed to educate people about membership.

Almost from the time someone comes to our church for the first time, I'm educating them about why membership matters. At the resource table I have a brochure on why membership matters. In our second time follow-up I begin to educate them about membership. If somebody checks membership on the back of their connection card, we have a membership packet that we send out to them. It explains what membership is, and it explains that it's a onetime, three hour class. We explain what's going on the class. We're doing everything we can, not just from the pulpit, but in other ways to educate people.

You see, what I'm giving you in this seminar is assimilation 101. It's the "don't miss" stuff, but then on top of that you can build, and you can build, and you can build. That's one of the reasons why at The Journey we are not just keeping one out of every ten first time guests, but we're keeping one out of every three first time guests, and sometimes even a little better than that. Understand that what we're covering here today is the foundations, and you can add in other pieces. Don't take away any of the pieces, but you can add to that. You can teach on it. You might have a packet back at the resource table. You might have a brochure, but the point is - educate people.

A third area during the service that I've already referred to is, utilize the connection card for spiritual growth. The connection card is part of your system. It is a way for people to sign up for events, but it's also a way for people to grow spiritually. Just as you have the specific event-driven next steps like membership, or fun events, or growth group, or small group sign-ups, you also have spiritual next steps: scripture memory, commitments to give, commitments to serve, commitments to pray.

I've used the connection card over the years in very diverse ways, from challenging people to read through the Bible in a year, to simply challenging people to pray before a meal, to challenging people to have a 15 minute quiet time every day. You name it. If I've preached on it, I've probably created a spiritual next step that people can take on the back of their connection card. That's one of the ways that regular attenders move forward in their faith, by taking these spiritual next steps.

I believe baptism is a spiritual next step. Obviously, the most important spiritual next step is becoming a follower of Jesus. It goes outside of the focus of our seminar now, but for each of those there is a follow up process. You can imagine, if someone checks that "I'm going to start having a daily devotion for the first time," I've got an email, and perhaps even a letter or some other materials I might send them about what it means to have a daily devotion.

The connection card, overtime, becomes more than just a contact info card. It becomes a spiritual growth tool, especially for your regular attenders, and then of course your members love it, too. In fact, a lot of churches that I coach, they tell me if they tried to take the connection card away - they're a year into it, or two years into it - they said, "If I tried to take the connection card away, my regular attenders and members would have an uprising," because they've seen how powerful that card can be when it comes to sharing prayer requests and growing spiritually.

The more you help people grow, the more you show them the biblical path for growth. The more you help them live out their faith in serving opportunities, the more ownership they take, and from our vantage point today, the more likely they are to go to membership class. So, during the service you can offer serving opportunities, teach on membership, utilize the connection card.

After the service, outside of the service, one of the things you really want to do with your regular attenders is ensure that they get involved in a small group. Whether that's a Sunday School at your church, decentralized small groups, Bible study fellowships, or whatever it might be, constantly evaluate who is a regular attender at our church that's not involved in a small group. Then, do everything that you can - in a reasonable, polite, respectable way - to challenge those regular attenders to get into groups.

Yes, you do it with gentleness. Yes, you do it with grace. You realize there are seasons in peoples' lives - maybe when they have a new job or they have a new child - when they can't be in groups, but the truth is, if you get a regular attender into a group, even if they haven't gone through membership class yet, if they engage that group, and they take a responsibility in that group, and they build relationships in that group, they are going to grow. They are going to become a fully assimilated member in your church.

Now, the way I do that is I notify, specifically, regular attenders about upcoming groups. When it's time to sign up for groups, I not only challenge the entire church to sign up, but I might even go above and beyond and pull a list of our database of regular attenders who are not in a group and send them a separate letter. Send them a separate invite. Maybe even, in my mind, target them on a Sunday for a conversation or for a nudge.

Depending on the size of your church, you may have a list of five or six people that you know are regular attenders, but they're not in a group. Then, when you see them on the Sunday, you put your arm around them - either literally or figuratively - and you pastor them. You help move them into a group. Nothing can accelerate the growth of a regular attender more than being there on Sunday and being in a small group. If those two things happen, they're well on the way to being a fully engaged member.

Then, when you lead groups, or when you have a group system going, utilize those groups as a fishing pool, if you will, for membership. Target your small group members to be members of the church, to be church members. Whenever we get ready to do a membership class, yes maybe I'll preach on it, yes we'll have the connection card and next steps like I talked about, but we will also look at people who are taking ownership in the church but have not yet become members. The first place I go to is small group members - people who are part of a small group, but they're not an official member of the church.

Now, the way it happens more times than not is, 60-70% of those who are in small groups are already members, but there's 30-40% of the new people who have come into our groups from the last semester, or from the last quarter, that are not yet members. Maybe I'll ask a small group leader to talk up membership in their group, or maybe I'll suggest that one group that has a large number of non-members, that they go to membership class together. I'm constantly trying to think of ways to move someone from being a group member to being a church member, because I know if they're in a group, they're going to be connected to

the church.

For all of this, I am talking about a formalized membership process. When someone signs up for a membership class, in our culture we refer to that as Class 101, which is membership. It's the first of several classes that we offer after someone becomes a member. It is a onetime, three hour class. Generally meets after our last service on a Sunday, but we have done membership classes during the week. In your resource guide I'll show you our membership covenant, and maybe some basic documents that we use in laying out membership, but it is a three hour class that someone would come to, meet the pastors, learn about the history of the church, the purpose of the church, the vision of the church, learn about the expectations of being a member.

At the end of the class they would sign up to be a member. Then, when they sign up to be a member we would evaluate that membership covenant to see if they meet the requirements to be a member. We have some biblical requirements to be a member, like salvation and baptism, as well as some cultural requirements that we've created that are part of our unique culture that may or may not apply to you. We want them to have been around for a few weeks before they join, so they know what they're getting into, and a few other things like that.

Then, if we agree that they're ready for membership, and they've signed up, then they become a member. Then that gets into member nurture and member care which is beyond the scope of assimilation. We do have a follow-up process, and we have an ongoing opportunity for members to grow: grow in their spiritual growth, grow in their spiritual leadership, grow in their understanding of mission, serving, giving, growing and all of that. Again, that's beyond this today. What I know is, if I can get regular attenders to take these opportunities of serving, growing, and joining a church, then I can help them become a fully engaged member.

One last thought in this session: What does a fully engaged member look like at your church? That is a topic that's worthy of conversation. At a basic level, a fully engaged member at the church I serve is - they are a follower of Jesus. They have been baptized. They follow Jesus in obedience in baptism. They are in an area of service. They have gone through membership class. They are regularly attending the weekend services. They have a regular connection to a small group - maybe not every semester, but they have a regular connection into a small group.

They are giving, at least something, and hopefully a full tithe. They have a general supportive view of our church. They're praying for our church. They're praying for me. This is a little hard to measure, but they have this general supportive view of where we're going as a church. That's a fully engaged member.

I've been privileged that most of the members that we have at The Journey, they were originally first time guests at our church. In fact, we started our church with no money, no members, and no meeting location. On that first Sunday, other than my wife, and my worship leader and his wife, everybody was a first time guest. Then over the years we've seen thousands of people go through this process that I've presented to you in these sessions. I'm privileged to say that the majority of the fully engaged members that we have, they originally started their journey with us for the first time. Others may have joined in the middle because they were already believers when they started coming to our church, but this is the way that it works.

As you think about what a fully engaged member looks like, that will help you think beyond today's seminar, about, "What does a membership class look like? How do I then hold members accountable to the covenant that we present in that class? How do we have a church that's full of love, and full of growth, that's healthy and growing with fully engaged members?"

This officially ends the process, but I hope you'll stay with me for at least one more session as I wrap up and remind you of what assimilation is all about. If you stop here that's fine, but if you'll come back, I've got one last short session for you as I offer some concluding thoughts about the assimilation system. Hope to see you then.

UPDATED AND EXPANDED:

**THE NEW
ASSIMILATION
SEMINAR**

**WHERE
TO START:
THE KEYSTONE
IN THE ENTIRE
ASSIMILATION
SYSTEM**



Nelson: Hey! I'm glad you came back. In this concluding session, I just want to encourage you to continue to move forward with your assimilation process.

You know you're not going to be able to build all of this at one time. Hopefully, I've overloaded you but at the same time giving you a vision of what a very powerful assimilation system would look like in your church. You may be thinking, "Well. Where do I start?"

Well, if you can't start with all of it, start with this one place. Start with those hand-written notes. I mentioned this many sessions back, but the hand-written note is really the keystone inside of the system. So, you may have made it all the way to the end here, and you may think, "I don't know what to do. I can't really implement all of this." Well, you can implement the hand-written note.

You know if you're just a single pastor, you can gather the names of first time guest, and then you can follow up with them with a hand-written note. So, I would start there. Let me also remind you that assimilation is connected to the other systems inside of your church. From a broad perspective, and I would even say a profound perspective, what I teach is that there are 8 systems inside of the church. Assimilation is one of those. But in addition to assimilation, you also have the Evangelism system, you have the worship planning system. You have the ministry system. You have the small group system. You have the stewardship system, the leadership system, and the strategic system.

So, there are these 8 systems, and beyond today, you want to continue to educate yourself on each of those systems. But here's what's cool about what you've done:

Assimilation improves all of the other systems. When you improve your assimilation system, in essence, it strengthens all of the other seven systems. By doing assimilation, you actually will improve your worship planning. By doing assimilation, you'll increase your evangelism. I mean just by getting ready for more first time guests, it does something in the evangelism world if you will, where God sends you more first time guests. Along down the line, we could go.

But understand that connection, and understand that even if you just do some of what we're talking about today, whether it's only the hand-written note for example, that that has an interconnected relationship to the other systems, and it increases and improves those systems as well.

You may say, "Well, how long will it take me to implement this assimilation system that we've been discussing?" Maybe you could implement it in as little as four months. It is possible that within four months if you have a very healthy church and perhaps a growing church, you might be able to implement it in four months. More realistically, it's going to take you between six and twelve months. It will realistically take you four months to get the connection card process in place, and then an additional four to eight months to implement the other stages.

Especially if you have to get into really improving your membership class, or you have to get into fixing your church database or whatever. But see this from the long view. See this from the perspective of the changes I make today are going to set me on the course of growth for the future. Now, if you really want some help beyond today, one of the next best steps that you can take is to go through my assimilation coaching.

In this assimilation coaching, I go through all kinds of sessions about how to implement the assimilation. I'm assuming that you've already listened to the seminar. And then in these coaching sessions, I talked about assimilation mistakes. So just in that very first session in my coaching, I'm going to help you avoid the most common mistakes that people make. I go deeply into the first time guests follow up process. What does that

literally look like from a database standpoint, from a staff management standpoint, who enters that? How do you have quality control? I go into measurement.

We have a good time talking about measurement. How do you know how many first time guests are coming back? How do you know what your connection card return rate is? How do you know how many regular attenders that you have? We get into it. We look at your website and how that impacts your assimilation, or could be hurting your assimilation. We have very detailed discussions about the connection card. And I hope you implement that script and do the hosting and even consider what are your options when it comes to receiving the offering.

We talk about what un-churched guests are especially looking for. Do you know there's a handful of things, like seven or eight things that un-churched people are really looking for, and they're totally different than what church people are looking for. We talk about building your follow up team, something by now you know that you're going to have to do. You can do a lot of this yourself, but you got to build that team.

We get into some of the finer pieces of assimilation process that we can't discuss in this 101 session. So, we get into the 201 strategies like a new comers reception or 301 strategies like the role of every pastor in assimilation. We talk about connection card follow up and maximizing membership. In fact in one of the coaching sessions, I give you seven ways to maximize your membership class, anyone can dramatically increase your attended set or next membership class. We go to the membership covenant and tracking your assimilation rate and then even deeper into prayer and assimilation.

So, if you're interested in that assimilation coaching, there's information in within this resource or you can go to my website and click on the coaching tab and learn more about assimilation. Or you can call our office and we'll be happy to help you. All of that should be available to you with a website or with the online link or with the videos and DVDs you have related to this resource. But I hope you will contact and consider going through this.

And the coaching is just one per church. So, maybe you've been going through this alone, or maybe you've been doing it with a team. Well, your whole team can continue that discussion and go through these sessions and each session is about an hour. There's between seven to nine sessions, depending on when you join the coaching. But take a look at that, there's information on the resource desk. Or you can feel free to call or check out my website for that.

So, let's talk about what assimilation all comes down to. You know, if you forget everything that I've talked about in all of these previous sessions, there's two words that I want you to remember, and all of assimilation comes down to these two words: relationships and responsibilities. Relationships and responsibilities.

If a first time guest comes to your church, and within the next three months, they get a relationship in the church. They are known by someone and they know someone. Then they're more likely to stick. If a first time guest comes to your church and they come back and they come back, and over say a three-month period they find a responsibility in your church. A place of service, a place where they take ownership, a place where they can fit. Then they will be assimilated.

Even if you never do a membership class, even if you don't do all of the follow up points that I've talked about here, even if you never go through a future resources on the other systems, or get involved in assimilation coaching. If you build a process, whether the one I've given you, or when you build yourself. If you build a process where you help people intentionally, build relationships and take a responsibility in the church, they will stick. So, if you forget everything that I've said about assimilation, just remember, it's all

about relationships and responsibilities.

And if you go back through these sessions again and you study them individually or next time you study them with your team, you'll see all throughout everything we've discussed in this seminar that's it all about helping first time guests build relationships. Relationships with God, first and foremost, a relationship with God and Jesus Christ. A relationship with other church members and then helping the second time guest and regular attenders find a place of responsibility in the church where they can serve, and then in doing so, where they can grow and become that fully developing follower of Jesus. Don't forget those two key words for all that we've talked about.

I want to leave you with a couple of verses. Remember 2nd Peter 3:18, our key verse for this entire seminar. "Continue to grow, or you must grow." It's how the New Living Translation makes that. "You must grow in the grace and knowledge of our Savior, Jesus Christ." I believe by doing this work that we've talked about, you're helping people grow. You're helping them discover the depth and the beauty of the grace and knowledge of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Then, as I've reminded you over and over, first time guests are a gift from God. Second time guests are a gift from God. Regular attenders are a gift from God. Every member that you have in your church, it's a gift from God. I hope you gather that and now are thinking that way about all the people in your church. People matter. Jesus died for people. God loves people. This is not so much about a system. All that you needed, it's really about the people that go through the system.

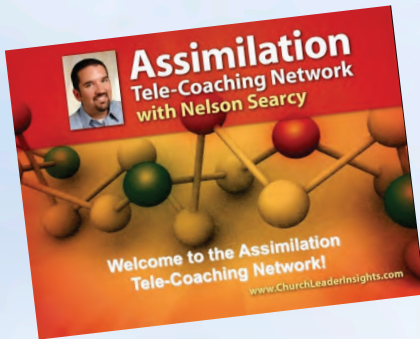
So, I hope you walk away with that and I hope you walk away with a deeper love for people. A deeper love for your church. But I will tell you. That sometimes running a system, sometimes managing a system, doing database entry, it can be tiring. So, I want to leave you with this verse from Galatians 6:9. It says, "So don't get tired of doing what is good. Don't get discouraged and give up. For we will reap a harvest of blessing at the appropriate time."

I hope during our sessions together we've planted some seeds that will bring great harvest inside your church. I wish that for you. I wish more first time guests to be given to your church. I wish for those to return for a second time and then find a relationship and stay as regular members. And then eventually get a responsibility where they can stay as fully engaged members. I pray that you will reap a harvest of blessing. I pray that you don't get discouraged and give up. But I pray that you let God guide you and provide you every step of the way.

It's been my privilege to do this seminar with you. Thank you so much. I hope to see you in future seminars that we have. I hope to see you in the assimilation coaching. God bless you.

CONTINUE YOUR ASSIMILATION TRAINING WITH NELSON!

Join the new **Assimilation Coaching Network** – seven months of online, on-demand training proven to maximize your Assimilation System and accelerate your growth!



This brand-new Assimilation Coaching Network will be led by Nelson Searcy and is available now, via a new on-demand, online module format (you participate at your convenience each month).

This coaching network will be based on the assimilation principles identified and taught by Nelson to thousands of churches through books, resources and live events, and will be provided in a format that you can watch at any time.

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Nothing can create faster growth in your church than the power of assimilation!

Keeping just two more first-time guests a week would grow your church by more than fifty people over the course of this network!

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You've already shown your commitment to growing your church through the power of Assimilation. Now take the next step and do everything you possibly can to make sure that no one slips through the cracks at your church!

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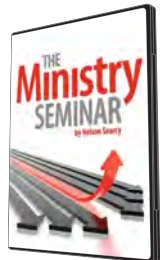
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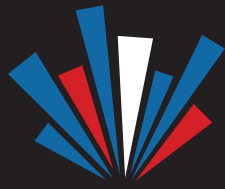
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RELATED RESOURCES FOR ADDITIONAL STUDY

WHY PEOPLE LEAVE YOUR CHURCH

Learn why people leave - and what you can do about it!

Few things are as painful as seeing people leave your church. Pastors often feel powerless to stop this from happening. The truth is, often this can be prevented! In this resource, Nelson Searcy explains the six most common reasons people leave your church. You'll learn how to make it occur less frequently and how to stay encouraged and focused when it does happen.

Includes: Over two hours of audio training, leader's guide, fill-in-the-blank listener's guide and the complete transcript of the seminar.

Bonus: A recording of a 30-minute Q-and-A with Nelson on why people leave and how it has impacted his leadership.

Available: Fully downloadable: \$99.95 | Three-CD set: \$129.95



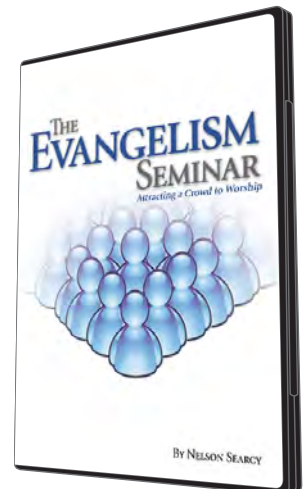
THE EVANGELISM SEMINAR

Raise the evangelistic temperature of your church!

Evangelism should be at the core of what you do as a church, but how do you invite the unchurched people in your community to hear the Good News? In this three-hour seminar, Nelson Searcy will lead you through the practical steps you can take to get everyone in your church involved in reaching their friends and neighbors. You'll develop a healthy, ongoing Evangelism System, including how to pray for the unchurched, how to challenge your leaders to engage the community and how to use publicity to attract people to your church!

Includes: Three hours of audio training, fill-in-the-blank listener's guide, sample emails, letters, postcards and promotional items.

Available: Fully downloadable: \$99.95 | Three-CD set: \$129.95



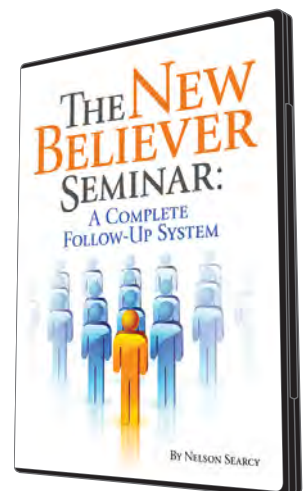
THE NEW BELIEVER SEMINAR

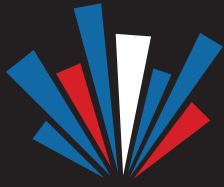
Help your new believers take their first steps toward discipleship!

How can you help people "step across the line" of faith in Christ? In this resource, Nelson answers it by giving you a comprehensive system to help you recognize people who have made a decision for Christ, and get them started on the road of discipleship. Learn to use your preaching calendar and effective follow-up to see people begin their new life in Christ!

Includes: Three hours of audio training, complete listener's guide, leader's guide and the actual editable new believer follow-up strategy used at The Journey Church each week. This one document alone has been described by many as being worth the investment.

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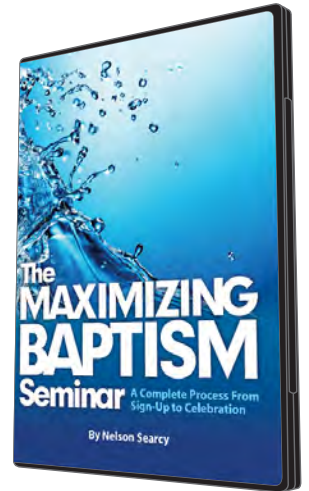
THE MAXIMIZING BAPTISM SEMINAR

A complete process from sign-up to celebration!

Do you have a plan to help people decide to be baptized and move forward to celebration and discipleship? In this three-hour seminar, Nelson walks you through a proven five-step system that will equip you to PROMOTE, PREPARE, PREACH, PRESENT and PRESERVE every baptism in your church. Help people overcome their fear and uncertainty about baptism so they can take this step of obedience!

Includes: Complete seminar audio, fill-in-the-blank listener's guide, leader's notes, more than 45 sample documents, fully editable baptism checklist, promotional emails and follow-up documents.

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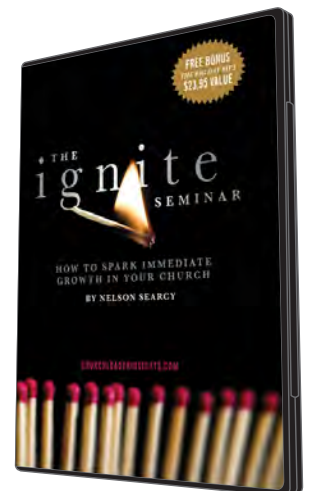
THE IGNITE SEMINAR

Learn how to double your church in a day!

Energize and mobilize your church to reach their community with the Gospel. This three-hour seminar from Nelson Searcy will walk you through planning and executing a "Big Day," a special event that draws people from your community in your church. Nelson has developed and honed the strategies in this resource to fuel growth at The Journey Church and in hundreds of coaching alumni churches. Now you can use these proven techniques to start – and keep – your church growing!

Includes: Complete audio, listener's guide, sample documents and promotional items.

Available: Fully downloadable: \$99.95 | Three-CD set: \$129.95



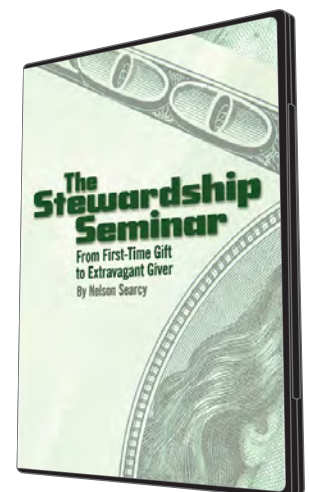
THE STEWARDSHIP SEMINAR

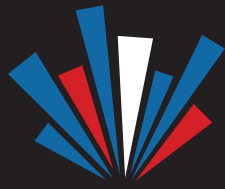
Help your people grow through biblical stewardship!

Stewardship isn't just a financial issue – it's a discipleship issue! Your people will be limited in their spiritual growth until they understand God's perspective on money. In this three-hour resource, Nelson explains how you can teach on money in a way that helps people begin giving, and you'll learn a step-by-step process to move people on to regular giving, tithing and extravagant giving. Plus, Nelson shows how to make it easier for your people to give!

Includes: Three hours of audio training, fill-in-the-blank listener's guide, sample emails, letters and follow-up documents.

Available: Fully downloadable: \$99.95 | Three-CD set: \$129.95





RELATED RESOURCES FOR ADDITIONAL STUDY

CHURCH MARKETING WORKSHOP

Discover proven marketing methods to reach more people for Christ!

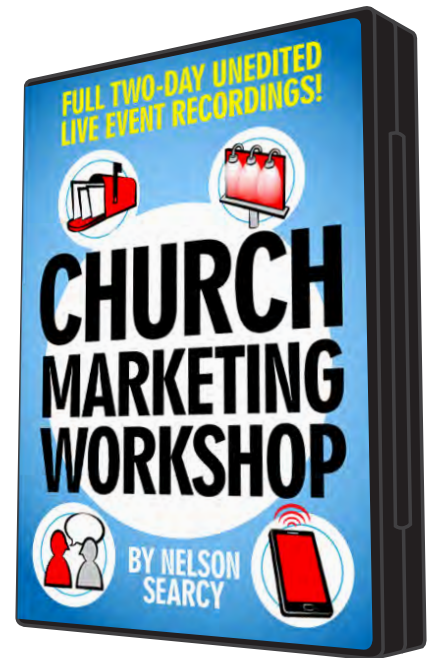
Nelson reveals all the marketing tips, strategies and tactics he's discovered and applied from 25 years in ministry and from coaching across the country! What you discover here will have a HUGE effect on your growth. If you believe in the power of evangelism, then you believe in the power of effective marketing!

In this brand-new resource, you'll discover:

- The huge difference between outrageously successful marketing and boring, unsuccessful marketing
- Simple steps to marketing your church without breaking your budget
- How to train yourself to think outside the box
- How to translate your church marketing from one media to the next
- How to implement your marketing in every form of media, both offline and online
- Simple strategies for discovering powerful ideas during your everyday life
- How to define "successful results"
- The most powerful methods that never fail
- How to craft great and effective headlines for your marketing
- Proven ways to increase your number of first-time guests
- Why you always need a deadline
- "Lumpy objects" that get your message opened and read
- How to dramatically increase the results of all your marketing
- Why you should be looking to swiping and deploying ideas from businesses that are marketing to you (yes, even outside ministry)
- How to double your attendance with direct mail
- How to most effectively use your limited dollars
- Marketing psychology: Entering the conversation in your recipient's head
- Speed strategies: How to get marketing implemented F-A-S-T
- Plus much, much more!

Includes: Two full days of audio training from the live workshop and the complete 300-page workbook, including a huge show-and-tell presentation of effective, impactful marketing examples.

Available: Fully downloadable: \$797.97



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YOUR
GROWTH!**

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Dear fellow Senior Pastor,

I want to give you the best opportunity to make this the most impactful year yet for your ministry, so today I'm inviting you to take the next step in your church growth by joining my **Senior Pastor Coaching Network**. The window is closing to get into the network at this special rate - there are only a few spots left. Once it's filled, that will be it.

Senior Pastor Coaching helps you go in-depth with me on the **Eight Systems of a Healthy Church** through online, on-demand coaching modules that you can access anytime!

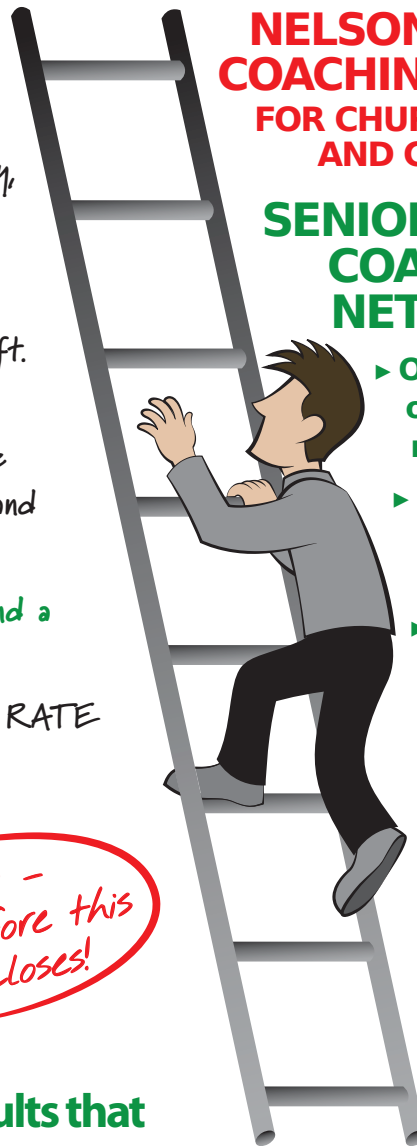
The results? **An average 25% increase in your attendance and a 20% increase in giving!**

There's never been a better time to join: You'll lock in a **VIP RATE** and save up to **\$1,800.00** a year!

Thank you for considering this invitation!

Your coach,

*Filling up -
act now before this
network closes!*



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Foundational network

Here are just a few examples of the typical results that pastors see as part of my Senior Pastor Coaching Network:



"Joining the Senior Pastor Coaching Network will be a personal and ministry-impacting experience. It brings real clarity to what's required to lead a growing church. It will be an investment into yourself and your ministry."

Jesse Giddens, Destiny Christian Center, Apple Valley, CA



"Being a part of this network has helped me to lead our church more effectively, reverse what had been a slow decline, mobilize greater numbers of our people in outreach and service, reach and retain more new people, and significantly raise the level of generosity in our church."

Robert Haynes, New Life Community, Olive Branch, MS



"Nelson's coaching is very practical and easy to apply. You will be stretched. You will have fruit. You will see growth and breakthrough in your ministry and church."

Dave Slater, Parkview Church, Guelph, ON, Canada

Yes Nelson, I want to join NOW for my best growth in 2016!

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You can also call Scott Whitaker at 561.921.8488 ext. 5



- Systems Overview
- Assimilation
- Stewardship Part 1
- Evangelism Part 1
- Evangelism Part 2
- Small Groups
- Worship Planning
- Stewardship Part 2
- Ministry
- Leadership and Staffing
- Personal Leadership
- Strategy



PLUS, you'll receive a "Coaching Blueprint" that gives you specific next steps!

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- The average increase in giving is 20% of your overall budget.
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- There's no other network like this!

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- Over \$1,679.00 in FREE resources from Church Leader Insights (including all eight systems seminars) in your first year, PLUS special discounts on any new resources.
- Regular group Q-and-A calls to ask your specific questions.
- Unlimited email access to me and my entire CLI team.
- FREE attendance at CLI (live or web) training events during your network (up to \$1,249.00 value).

Add the online Senior Pastor Coaching Network to your membership now, and get immediate access to the Systems Overview as soon as you join!

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Led by me, this network is based on the **8 Systems of a Healthy Church** that I've identified and taught to thousands of churches, through books, resources and live events. You'll receive **online coaching sessions** over the course of this network that you can fully participate in anytime. And unlike other networks, **you'll receive both the audio and video.**

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Lock in the lowest monthly rate available now, **saving up to \$1,800 in the first year!** Get FREE access to the Renegade Pastors Network, PLUS over \$1,679.00 in new bonus resources, including all eight Systems Seminars!

I want to grow in 2016!

Yes Nelson, I want to join NOW!

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