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Why People **LEAVE** Your Church

(And What You
Can Do About It)

By Nelson Searcy

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Hi, this is Nelson Searcy, and welcome to this resource entitled **Why People Leave Church and What You Can Do About It**. I'm so excited that you picked up this resource and over the next few minutes that we have together, I want to try to give you six reasons why people church and what you can do about it. And the truth is, if you have been in ministry more than a month, you've had someone leave. You've had someone leave your church. You've had someone leave your ministry area. You've had someone, perhaps, even leave you. And the reality is as pastors we all face this conundrum of getting people to stay in our churches, getting them involved in our churches, and preventing them from leaving. You see, the truth is, when somebody leaves your church, it hurts. And chances are, that's why you've picked up this resource because someone has left your church and it hurts. I mean, I think back to 1989 when I first became a Christian and I had my first involvement in church, I was baptized with a guy. And shortly thereafter, I was growing and I was involved in the church, but he was no where to be found. I mean, what happened to him? Where did he go? Why did he leave church? And why did I stay? Then 1990 when I entered into ministry and I started working part time as a pastor of outreach on a larger church staff, I began to realize that there was people that we would reach and some would stay and some wouldn't stay. Other people would come for the first time and they would stay and other people would come for the first time and they would not stay. So why do people leave church and really since 1990, I've been a student of church growth, and evangelism. And if this is your first engagement with me, your first resource with me, then maybe a little history about my journey would be helpful to you.

As I said, I started in ministry in 1990, and I immediately went on staff at a church and it was a part-time position in the outreach department of this particular church. After that I served as an associate pastor of a relatively small church. Then shortly thereafter, I became pastor of my very first church. It was a small Baptist church in Charlotte, North Carolina, where I was working on an undergraduate degree. Then I pursued a degree at Duke University and while I was there working on a graduate degree, I met a guy who wanted to start a church and I had my first encounter with church planting in 1994. And here I really began to learn these lessons that I want to share with you today, because we were reaching a lot of unchurched people. We were reaching a lot of dechurched people. And many of them would stay and our church would grow, but also people would leave. And I remember very well the first time a guy that I was friends with came to me and said, "Nelson, I'm leaving New Horizons, but I hope you and I can still be friends." I thought to myself, "This is not how it normally works. I mean, if he and I had been working together

down at the Starbucks and he decided to leave the Starbucks, chances are he and I still could be friends.” But, I was in this position of asking myself, “Can I be friends with this guy? Can I still disciple this guy, and still invest in this guy even though he is not staying at the church?” And we actually did become semi-friends over time, but because we didn’t have that connection with church, our friendship became very distant. You see, the truth is, there is something about church that is different than just working with someone. When someone leaves a church, they leave you, they leave a part of you and it feels that way. Because if you don’t have that bond on the spiritual level, then it’s very different than just not having that bond on the career level or on perhaps the hobby level. So at New Horizons back in 1994 to 1998, I saw a lot of people stick to our church, but I also saw people go. And I saw, first hand, what that did to our staff and how we would weep over people who would leave and how we would see people’s lives change when they wouldn’t stay. Then shortly thereafter, leaving that church, I went on staff at Saddleback Church and here I had a front row seat for a number of years working with Pastor Rick Warren and seeing systems that were built in a healthy church that would cause people to stick and obviously decided to stay at Saddleback Church, but even there, even in a very large church that offered every imaginable ministry to all age groups, there would still be people who would say, “This church just doesn’t have enough for me. The preaching here is not deep enough. I can’t find my place here.” And they would make excuses that church was too big, or when I pastored that first church in Charlotte, the church was too small. And so, I began to really seriously think about this idea of why do people stay and why do people stick, and why do they leave. And then most of my experience has really come since 2002.

So in 2002, on Easter Sunday, my wife and I started The Journey Church of the City. In New York City. And now so many years later, that church has grown and we are a multi-site church and we have campuses in various locations around the country, and we have started churches in different places, but I have seen people come, people stay, people stick, people grow, but at the same time, people leave.

So why do people leave your church? And I’m sure you have been asking yourself that question. That’s exactly why you have picked up this resource. Well, the truth is there are as many reasons why people leave churches as there are people who have left churches. I mean, if you think about it, it’s like the old saying about if you get three Baptists together, you have four opinions. Well, if you get three people together, and you ask them why did you leave your last church, they would probably come up with five or six different answers.

And you see, people leave churches for any number of reasons. I mean, in many ways, on a small percentage of cases, we have no idea why people leave. In fact, I have found that about 20% of the time, there is no diagnosable reason why people leave. I mean, you just can't figure it out, 20% of the time. And they left because they didn't like the color of your shirt. In fact, I had someone tell me, one time, they would be willing to stay at our church if I would simply wear a tie from time to time when I preached. Now, the truth is, I have been known to wear a tie from time to time, on special occasions, but normally, that's not my attire and I certainly wasn't willing to adjust my attire to keep this particular person, because if it wasn't the tie, or if I solved the tie problem, next time it would be the shirt problem. Next time it would be the shoe problem. Next time it would be the sound problem. Because 20% of the time, you just really have no idea why people leave. But the good news is, 80% of the time, it is diagnosable, and I would say that these six reasons we are going to look at in this resource go to the 80% factor. In other words, 80% of the people who leave your church leave because of one of these six reasons that we are going to look at today. And I think that should give you a lot of hope that if you learn these reasons, understand these reasons and then implement the solutions and the cultural changes that we are going to talk about, you can see more people stay at your church and then those who do leave, you will know more clearly why they left and I think that will give you some hope. Because when somebody leaves, it hurts. You feel betrayed. You feel like that they came to your church, they were involved in your church, they were growing in your church, but now, you feel betrayed. They committed to your leadership. They said all kinds of nice things about you. They filled out surveys that talked about how great your church was. They got involved. They took notes. They were there, but now they have left. And that betrayal and oftentimes we, in ministry, talk about that and joke about people who have betrayed us in ministry, about Judas people that we have inside of our church because that's really how it feels. At the same time, it has consequences beyond you. Because your family can feel that way. Your family feels the impact when maybe a family who started the church with you, maybe a family who led with you through a big transition at your church, or maybe a family that was in a small group with you, or a family who had a child who was in the student ministry with your children. They decide to leave. And so that impacts your family and your family can be hurt and emotionally it is very hard for them to process. And they may come to you and say, "What is it about you that is not right, or what is it about our church that's not right?" And so all of these emotions go into it. And so, I hope as we work through this resource you can find some clarity that in some ways will help ease over those feelings of betrayal or feelings

of hurt that you face, but I also hope you will find some clarity. Clarity about why people do leave church and maybe I can give you some handles around which you can see how they can be reclaimed or perhaps you will see for the first time that the best thing you can do for that person is to give them a chance to leave your church gracefully.

Now, I'm not the first person to talk about this topic. Many other people have addressed this topic. There are a number of books out there on this topic. There are people who have written on this topic. They are hard to find, but they certainly are available and as I have tried to study every single book that I could find on church growth and church helps, since 1990, I've encountered a few books from time to time. And honestly, some of what I am going to say in this resource is going to go contrary to what you have heard in the past. For example, I'm going to talk with you about why exit interviews are an absolute waste of your time. I'm going to talk with you about why you should chase some people and try to get them to come back to your church. I'm going to talk with you about when somebody asks you to change the worst possible thing that you can do for their growth and for your church's growth, is for you to actually consider that change. And then, I want to challenge some of your systems. I'm going to show you that many times it's not a people issue, or it's not something that you've done, but rather it's a system issue in your church. Finally, I want to show you that there are some people that just will not tell you the truth about why they are leaving and so if you make decisions based on what they tell you, it's going to lead to changes in your church that are actually going to hurt the future growth of your church. And so I hope all of this together is going to give you a clearer sense of leadership. Because, there is a fog that occurs when you lead a church. Sometimes if I can help you see through that fog, you can have greater clarity about your leadership, and about your vision and about the mission of your church. So, I hope this resource will do all of that.

Now, before we go any further, I have to tell you that I have learned something in being a student of growing churches. Because since about 1990, I have asked myself why do some churches grow and others don't. And I imagine you've asked yourself that question. Two churches on the same street, in the same community, reaching, it seems like, the same type of people. One church takes off and really grows and the other church doesn't. Well, the truth is, that growing churches do things differently than non-growing churches. And if you see a church that's growing, it's worth asking yourself some questions. Now, I talk about this in another resource that I have, but when you see a church that is growing, you have to ask—what are they doing that I'm not doing? Because many times a growing church is

doing something that you're not doing. And so maybe as you listen to this resource you will learn that there are some things that you could be doing that will cause more people to stick to your church and therefore, grow your church faster and grow them in Christ faster. And maybe you can learn some things from other growing churches. But you want to ask (1) what are they doing that I'm not doing? You want to ask (2) what are you doing differently than what they are doing? In other words, are you doing (a) while they are doing (b)? Are there differences between what the two of you are doing? In other words, you are doing it one way, but they are doing it in a different way. You're doing Sunday school, but they are doing decentralized groups. You're having the ushers come through and pass out the guest cards. They put the guest cards in the bulletin. What are the differences between your two churches? And then another great question is (3) what have they stopped doing that you are still doing? Because maybe some of the things that you are doing are actually hurting you and they decided a long time ago to give those up. And so, that's a topic that I address in another resource that I have on Growth Barriers. But maybe that will help you think about why do some churches grow when others don't because the truth is growing churches do things differently than non-growing churches.

Now, here's a big one when it relates to this resource. Here's the big difference between growing churches and non-growing churches. Growing churches spend very little time trying to reclaim people who have left. And they spend the majority of their time trying to reach new people. Now, let me say that again. Growing churches spend very little time trying to reclaim people who have left. They spend the majority of their time trying to reach new people. Now, I know what you are thinking, well, Nelson, if that is true why do I even need this resource? In some ways, I could just pause this resource right here and stop because aren't you saying to me that I should spend no time trying to reclaim old people? Well, in some ways, I am saying you should probably spend less time or at least you should change the way that you focus on getting people to stick, as opposed to going after people after they have already left. So I want to help you keep more people and I want to help more people stick to our church so that you won't have to deal with people leaving less often, but I also want you to understand that you probably don't need to spend nearly as much time as you think trying to reclaim old people. Now, again, the problem with this is that the old people that leave us cause us a lot of pain. It hurts when people leave. There is heartache when people leave. Sometimes there is a mess left behind when people leave. There's gossip and there's conversation about why did they leave? And so it's important that we

understand these factors about why people leave because we have to lead through people leaving. Whether it's just one family, or whether it's an entire, perhaps, split, inside of your church. But at the same time, I want you to understand that stagnant churches spend very little time reaching new people, and they focus a lot of times on reclaiming old people. Now, growing churches focus the majority of their time on reaching new people, while they spend little time trying to reclaim old people. Stagnant churches spend most of their time trying to reclaim old people, while they spend very little time trying to reach new people. And so there is a difference in this area.

Now, when I say "reaching old people," I'm not talking about "old age," I'm talking about people who have been around the church for a while. So in a lot of stagnant churches the conversation goes something like this: "If we can get all the old people who used to come here (again not old when it comes to age, but old when it comes to they have been involved in our church for a while), if we could just get all of the old people who have been on the roll of our church for a while to come back, then our church would grow. So you know, pastor, instead of trying to reach all of these new people that are moving in down the street, let's just try to reclaim the people that have been on our rolls for 10 years, 20 years, or 30 years, who we haven't seen in a while." And to tell you the truth, that sounds like an attractive proposition. Because if you studied business and you've studied marketing, you know that the third-easiest customer to reach is someone who's been a past customer. But you know the truth is, if they haven't been in a long time, and there is a reason why they haven't been to your church, maybe one of the reasons that we are going to look at in this resource, then the chances of you getting to come back is pretty slim. But now, there is very practical percentage of time that I think you should invest in reclaiming people that haven't been to church in a while. Old people. Not older people, not old in age, perhaps, but just people who have been around for a while. So if I had to give you the 80/20 principle, I would say this: growing churches spend 80% of their time reaching new people and only 20% of their time trying to reclaim people that have left the church, while stagnant churches spend 80% of their time trying to reclaim people who have left their church, and only 20% of their time trying to reach new people. So that's the 80/20 rule.

And so, I want to challenge you to spend 80% of your time reaching new people. And I have plenty of other resources and books and things on evangelism and growth barriers and assimilation and books that I have written on this topic and resources and intensives and all of that. I have plenty of material that you can study from me on how to reach new

people. In fact, if you look at all of the resources that I have done, 80% of my resources are all about helping you reach new people. Because growing churches spend 80% of their time reaching new people. But at the same time, I believe you should invest 20% of your time thinking about how to reclaim those who once attended. In other words, you should spend 20% of our time asking yourself—why are people leaving our church? Because this actually could be a small growth engine for you. Now, it's not going to be a growth engine like assimilation is or like an evangelism system might be, or like breaking growth barriers has the opportunity to be. But thinking about how to keep people at your church can be a growth engine. Because you can actually grow your church faster if you have less people leave. So you obviously want to get more people in the door, you want to have more people stay, but then you want them to stick. Because think about it—if you have an attrition rate that is 25% a year, but you cut that to 10% a year, that means you have grown by an extra 15% just by cutting your attrition rate. And you notice I am trying to avoid using the old terms that church growth theorists have used when it comes to reclaiming people or why people leave church, things like attrition rate or other words like that because those words have baggage with them. So I'm trying to create some new words or use words that do not have baggage. But the simple fact is, if more people stuck to your church, if you could close the back door tighter, your church would grow faster. And so in some ways, thinking about why people leave church and how you can keep more people, is also a church growth issue.

Now, when you think about people leaving church, there is really two types of people that leave. The first is the type of person that you want to keep. This is the kind of person you really wanted to keep. You really thought you might be able to help. And really, the rest of this resource is going to be entirely focused on how do you keep people that you want to keep. This is the person whose experienced life change in your church. This is the person who was baptized in your church. This is the person who hadn't been to church in 20 years, but they came back, they had an experience with God and they really been on the straight and narrow path. And so that's the kind of person you want to keep. We are going to talk about six ways that you can keep those, or at least six reasons why that person leaves, and how you can impact their ability to stick. But then at the same time, before we look at that, there are also people that you probably want to leave. Do you have any people like that in your church? I mean, if you could pick over the next year 10 people that you would like to have leave, do you have a list of 10? I bet you might a list of 20 or might even have a list of 30. Because there are people that need to leave. In one city that I was in with a group of pastors that I was coaching, and they referred to this as blessed subtraction. Blessed

subtraction, Jesus is mine. Oh what a foretaste of glory divine. You ever have that pastor, and you say—I've been praying for years that they would leave. Well, that's the kind of person you want to leave. They were not a good fit. They were causing problems. They were always in your face. They were critical. They were gossipy. And no matter how much discipleship you provided them, or how much pastoral care you offered, or how much shepherding you gave, there was just no way you were going to turn this person around. They were a bad apple, and they were close to spoiling the entire bunch. So just understand that.

A lot of what we have been taught in the past is about how to keep everyone at your church. But the truth is, you are never going to be able to keep everyone at your church. In fact, there are people that need to leave your church and you should just let them leave. While at the same time, there are people that do not need to leave your church, and you need to create systems, organizations, cultures that keep them in your church that cause them to stick. So what we are going to talk about in the rest of this resource, is what can you do to keep the right people from leaving your church. So let's ask the question: "Why do the right people leave our church and what can we do about it?"

So why do the people you want to keep leave, and what can you do about it? I want to give you six reasons why they leave. Here number one:

1. Poor fit. You have someone come to church. Maybe they are dechurched, or maybe they are unchurched, and you really want to reach them. You really think you can help them. You have other people in your church like them who have been helped. But the truth is, they are just a poor fit for your church. In other words, you could help them, but they don't like the kind of music that you have. You could help them, but they would rather go to a church that is formal in its style. You could help them but they really need to go to a church that is casual in style. You could help them, because the Gospel could help them, but sociologically speaking, your church is at a different place than they are. It's very hard for a church that focuses on ministering to the poor to really help someone who is very wealthy. I know the Gospel cuts across all sociologic demographics but the truth is, people are more likely to grow when they do not have to cross sociological barriers, in their local church. Now, I have had plenty of people come to The Journey in the past and I have really looked at them and thought, "We could help them." But what they wanted to be in a church that was structured

differently than ours. They didn't like the fact that we were a pastor-led church. They wanted to be in a church where they could vote on everything. Here, obviously, I am talking about someone who is probably formerly churched, but maybe they have been out of church for a while, but they wanted a church that was more congregational in its model. Well, at The Journey, we just really don't vote on much of everything. And so it's not that voting and having a congregational style is wrong. It's not that having a pastor led church is right. It's just a matter of structure being different. At the same time, in our New York locations, The Journey has primarily been a young professional church. And that means, we are primarily there for people who work in mid-town Manhattan, or work on Wall Street, so it's mainly for professionals in white collar jobs. And some of our other locations are different than that, but in particular, the Manhattan location that I am thinking about is primarily a white collar place. So if someone comes in who has more of a blue collar orientation, they are probably not going to fit in that particular style. At the same time, I think about one of our other Journey locations and it has a very rock-and-roll style, it's very loud and it has lights and fog machines, and all that goes into that. And I think about the person who comes in who is more sanguine, who wants to experience a contemplated worship service or silent worship service, but the truth is—we probably have helped people like that person on the surface in the past, but they just simply do not fit in our church.

Now, the truth is, there are people who fit in your church and there are people who don't fit in your church. I'm not calling these folks misfits, I am just simply saying, there are people who fit in your church and there are people who don't fit in your church. And this is a big truth, you are not going to be able to reach every person in your area, in your city, or in your county. You are not going to be able to do that. There is a group of people that God has called you to reach, and you are best equipped to reach them. For example, there is a church that we work with in Manhattan that is in the Lower East Side. Which has traditionally be an area of the city that is really poor and it's made up of people who are down and out on their luck. They reach a very different type of person than our church on the upper west side reaches. On the Upper West Side we reach folks who are more like Seinfeld, and we reach young professionals that on the Lower East Side, where my friend pastors, he reaches people who have been on welfare all of their lives. He reaches people who have been in and out of mental hospitals. Which church is better? Well, you say it would be great if people on the upper west side went to church with people who have been in and out of mental hospitals, and it would be great if people of the lower east side went to

church with people who had been in and out of corporate offices on 39th floors. Well, that would be great, but the truth is, that is generally not how it works. Generally, there is a fit. There is a group of people that you are best equipped to reach. And if someone shows up to your church, even though outside they look like somebody you may be able to help, if on the inside they are not a good fit for your church, they are not going to stay. Now this doesn't mean that your church is snobbish. It doesn't mean that your church has a country plum mentality. It simply means that you can be a church for anybody, but you're not going to be a church for everybody. So I say that all the time about our church. We aren't a church for anybody, but we're not a church for everybody. So everybody is welcome, everybody is welcome to come. But, you may not find your fit here, you may not find that our style relates to your style, or you may not find the structure that we have fits the type of structure you think a church should have. Now, every pastor is going to be challenged to change their style or to change their structure in order to get people to stay. But instead of focusing on how can you get more people to stay, by changing your style, or by changing your structure, ask yourself, "Who are the people that we could best reach, because of our style, than because of our structure?" Now, this temptation is really strong when for example, you have someone come to your church and maybe they offer to give a lot of money, let's say. And they say, "If you would just be willing to change your structure, we would be willing to significantly invest financial resources in your church."

The truth is that can be very tempting sometimes. We can be tempted to change our structure because someone says they are willing to stay and willing to give a large amount of money, if we do it. But many times, I believe this is a test of vision. I believe it is a test of calling. I believe God is testing you to say, "Are you going to be the church that I have called you to be? Are you going to stick with the vision that I gave you? Are you going to stick with the style or the structure that I led you to implement inside of this church?" And then, of course, on the flip side of that is you may pastor a church where you did not choose the style. You did not choose the structure. And you've got people saying, "Pastor, I really like you but I just can't the style. I just can't stay with this structure." And your hands are tied. You don't even have the ability to change the style or change the structure, and instead, you have to let them leave your church. Now, the truth is, you can change the style of the church. You can change the structure of your church. It's not something to be done quickly. It's not something that is to be quietly. It's something that needs to be done carefully and strategically, and prayerfully. But for this resource, I am assuming that you

have a particular style that is your style. And that style can be very, very different from my style. I am assuming that you have a structure that is your structure. That structure could be very, very different from my structure. But I have a structure, you have a structure. I have a style, you have a style. And every church in your community, and every church in your county, and every church in your city has probably a different structure, or a different style or at least uniquenesses in them. And the truth is, it takes all different kinds of churches to reach all different kinds of people. And so we need all kinds of churches, of all kinds of styles, and all kinds of structures because there are all kinds of people that need to be reached. So if you have a particular style and structure, you are going to reach a certain kind of person. If I have a different style and structure, I am going to reach a different kind of person and that's okay. That's okay. There are plenty of people that need to be reached. And so when somebody comes to you and you wear a coat and tie on Sunday, and they say, "Boy, if you preached in jeans and a golf shirt, I would be willing to stay." You know what? Bless them and let them leave. If you preach in a golf shirt and Dockers every Sunday and somebody comes to you and says, "If you wore a coat and tie, I would be willing to stay," then bless them and let them leave.

You know, at our church, I often preach what is called "verse with verse" sermons. I don't necessarily preach "verse by verse". Now, truthfully, over the course of a year, 20% of my sermons will be verse by verse sermons. But there are an occasional people who come to me and say, "Nelson, if you just taught every week verse by verse, we could really make this church our home." And sometimes I have to say to them, "You know what, there's a couple of good churches that I know in the area that teach that way, and you are going to grow better in their church than you are in our church." Because you can't please everyone. In fact, somebody once said, "I don't know what the path to happiness is, but I can tell you the path to unhappiness is trying to please everyone. You can't please everyone and God doesn't want you to please everyone." You say, well, what about those verses in the Bible where Paul says, "I have become all things to all men so that I might all by means reach some." Certainly, in the Bible you see some examples of that. You see some examples of adapting the language of the church or adapting the presentation of the church to reach a particular culture. But here, I think it's primarily related to evangelism, and it's not related to style or structure. Because you can't offer 50 different services with 50 different styles. You can only structure a church one way. And I hope the way you are structured is structured for growth, but you can't change the structure of your church so don't be afraid to accept

the fact that you may be a poor fit for someone. So, when this happens, what do you do? Well, the first thing that you can do is you can bless them, and allow them to leave. You can bless them and allow them to go to the church down the street. I mean, you haven't done anything wrong. They haven't done anything wrong. Why can't we bless the situation and say, "You know what, you are right. You love verse by verse preaching, or you love for a congregational approach to church. Or you love a contemplated service, or love a church that is structured differently than ours. That's great. I bless that structure, and I bless you. And you know what, there are some great churches in the city that I would be willing to help you find."

Now, chances are you probably not have this conversation with them. It probably would never come up. But just understand that sometimes people leave because they are a poor fit. So, you can bless them in their leaving. You can help your family understand that this is who you are as a church. They are looking for something different in a church and that's why we love the church down the street. When I first started The Journey back in 2002, we were a church that had rock and roll music and we had a pre-modern worship flow to our services, and I attended to preach very topical messages. But there would be people who attended our church, people who that looked like the kind of people that we could help on the outside. But they would say, "I really want a church that focuses on liturgy, and I really wished that you would preach from the lectionary." And preach that kind of messages. And I began to quickly realize that it was a blessing to have a church down the street that did use the liturgy, that did have a liturgical service that was made up of a choir with hymn books and things of that nature. They are a very different style from our church. Because now they came to our church and somehow or another God sent them there first but then I could help them find a church where they would fit in and they could start to grow, where they would not have to make a sociological leap to fit in at the church. But then at the same time, there were people who had been at that church for a while they heard about our church and that's the kind of church they wanted. They were just enduring the liturgy because there was really no other option for the kind of style they found and so they found their way over here. That is just the way the Kingdom works. And we can bless this. Now, I'm not talking about trying to steal sheep from another church. I'm not talking about being keepers of the aquarium either. I am talking about just the legitimate differences in style and why somebody might leave your church because of it. So when they do, bless them. Now, something else that should happen when you have a situation of a poor fit, is that it should

allow you to recommit to your vision. To recommit to your vision. You see, not only can you bless them and help them find a church but you can take that opportunity to recommit to your vision. You know when that person came to our church and they were willing to give big money to our church if we would just make some changes in our church, and I realized that they were a poor fit and we were not going to make those changes because they would be going against the call that God had for us, that deepened my commitment to the vision God had given me. And certainly part of me wanted them to stay and part of me wanted them to give, and part of me wished that perhaps I had changed what I changed, but the majority in me and the more spiritual side of me said, you know what—we just made the right decision. It was a hard decision, though, it was hard to admit that they didn't fit, but you know, God did not call us to be the type of church that they wanted us to be. I have not been called to teach in the style that they wanted me to teach. Our music is not going to be the type of music they wanted it to be. So it really allowed us to recommit to our vision. And I use that as a teaching point for our volunteers or a teaching point for our staff to say, "You know what, we are a church that anybody can attend, but we not going to be a church where everybody stays. Because we offer a certain kind of service. The Gospel can affect them in very different ways but the way we present it here at our place is in a way that unchurched people can understand and a way that puts the cookies on the bottom shelf, in a way that is very inviting and engaging for those who haven't been to church in a while. So someone comes in and they want a different kind of experience from that we may not be the church for them. Now, just another simple structure example from here is that at our church right now, we do not do Sunday school. Now, I'm not down on Sunday school. I have nothing against Sunday school, it's just that we do decentralized small groups. So if somebody comes to our church and they are just focused on the fact that we have to do Sunday school before worship, I just know that they are a bad fit. So I have to help them find a church or maybe direct them, or just leave them on their own to find a church that does have Sunday school, but what that does is it allows us to refocus our vision. And to say, "Are we still a church that is committed to not offering Sunday school? Are we still a church that is committed to small group? Are we doing things the right way?" That certainly allows us to recommit to our vision.

Now, here's a third point of examination and conversation when you realize that someone is a poor fit for your church. I think it is also a good time to examine your promotion. When someone leaves your church who is a poor fit, it may be worthwhile saying, "Why did they

show up here to start with?" If someone is looking for a liturgical worship and they show up at your place and your rocking worship, or is someone is looking for rocking worship and they show up at your place looking for liturgical worship and here again, I'm not saying that liturgical worship can't be rocking, and I'm not saying rocking worship can't be liturgical, I'm just using an example here. Just trying to make it simple. You may say, "Why did they show up? Why did they show at your place?" Well, maybe they showed up because of convenience, or because it's right around the corner, or maybe they showed up because they have a friend who goes there. But you may ask yourself, is there something we are doing in our promotion that is not being clear that is making it unclear about who we are? So for example, if your promotion has pictures of people who are in their 70's but everybody in your church is in their 20's, and then the first time guest shows up in their 70's and they don't fit, you may say—well, why is that? Or the flip side may be true. If everybody in your church is in their 50's but everybody on your promotion is single and in their 20's and then someone who is single and in their 20's shows up, and they look around and all there are, are a bunch of 50 year olds who are empty nesters, something's wrong with that. You see, you don't get to reach who you want. You reach who you are. And so who you are is going to be the best determiner of who you are going to reach and I know a lot of times churches say, "Well, we have been a blue-collar church, but we really want to reach that white-collar neighborhood." Just because you promote well to that white-collar neighborhood and you get them to come and check out your church, it doesn't mean they are going to stay. In other words, you may need to start a new church that reaches a new type of person.

I know what I am talking about here is rather controversial, but I hope as you think about this and as you realize that there are people who are simply going to leave because they are a poor fit, it is going to give you peace with the fact that you can't reach everyone, that you can't be a church for everybody. Instead, you can realize that there are people that you can reach and you celebrate your uniquenesses and you build on those uniquenesses. Because the more authentic you become about who you are and who God has called you to be, the more people you are going to reach. The simple fact is, diffused light has no power. But focused light, like a laser can cut through steel and your church is going to be far more effective if you try to reach people that you can disciple, that you can lead to Christ that are going to be a good fit with your church, than if you try to go in 50 different directions and reach people that are very different from the people that you are already reaching. So, one of the reasons, for people that you want to keep end up leaving your church is simply because

of a poor fit.

Now, let's talk about the second reason that people that you want to keep end up leaving your church. And it's a three letter word: sin.

2. Sin. The truth is sometimes people that you want to keep, that you really want to disciple, they leave your church because of sin. Let's think about the example that Jesus gave us in the Parable of the Sower. You remember this? Jesus told about this wise farmer who went out to sow some seed. And as he scattered his seed, he had a particular field in mind but truthfully in that field some fell on good soil and some fell on bad soil. Now, for the purposes of this resource, I don't necessarily want to go into all the soils and what Jesus said it meant, and how He impacted it, but if you look at that quite literally, one-fourth of the seed fell on good soil, and three-fourths of the seed fell on bad soil. And so I don't know if that's a model to say that for every four people you reach, one will stay and grow and bring a harvest of 30, 60, 90 or 100 fold, but maybe so. But the truth is, some of the people that you are going to reach, the seed is going to grow in shallow soil. And so it's going to spring up but the cares of the world, the heat of the sun, is going to get those people and they are not going to stay. Now, you can do something about this. And we'll talk about what you can do about this. But you know the birds are going to get some. The sun is going to get some. The cares of the world are going to get some. And so there are going to be people who come to your church, stay for a little while, and then fall back into that old life of sin. I think the most vivid example for me is a young lady that we baptized at our second Journey baptism. And at our second Journey baptism, back in 2003, we baptized a young lady, we will just call her Nichole. And we baptized Nichole, and Nichole had gone through some major life change in our church and some major life change in her own life. And she had really changed things for the better. She was involved in a group. She was growing. She had a lady in our church who was discipling her. She was on what you and I would call the "straight and narrow path". So she continues to attend for several months after this baptism. She goes through a series of groups and I started thinking about her about eight months later and I realized I hadn't seen her in a while. I started to ask a few people—have you seen Nichole? And they said—no, she stopped coming to our group. I started asking some other people if they had seen her in worship. And they said—well, I think I saw her a couple of weeks ago, I'm not sure. Well, now 10 months into this, maybe even a year into it, I've not seen Nichole in quite a while. And so I'm actually out walking through the city one day and just running some errands, and it's a big city. New York City is quite a large city, but I'm walking through the

city and I see a person who is a friend of Nichole's, that I had met before. And she walks up and says—hello to me. I greet her. And in the midst of the conversation, I said—how's Nichole doing? I haven't seen her in a while. And I could tell I embarrassed her friend just a bit, and kind of put her head down, and she said—oh, you didn't hear? I said—hear what? Is she okay? And the lady told me that Nichole had moved back in with her ex-boyfriend, and they were now living together. Now, Nichole never wrote me a letter. She never sent me an email to say—Dear Pastor Nelson, God really did something in my life, but I had this opportunity to move back in with my boyfriend, so I'm going to fall back into sin and fall away from the church and you're not going to see me anymore. Never? Never did she do anything like that. But she had done what in the old days we used to call backslide. She was backslidden. She had fallen back into sin. They say—well, maybe that says something about the discipleship processes that The Journey or maybe if she had a better mentor, or maybe if she had a better experience at the group, or maybe this or maybe that, and certainly I evaluated many of those things, and thinking about Nichole, like what could we have done differently. What could we change and how could we tighten this up and how could we stay in better touch with her, and you'll hear about some of the changes that we made in our church to deal with situations like this. But the truth is people are going to fall back into sin. The birds are going to get some. The sun is going to scorch some, and the cares of the world are going to strangle some. It is just going to happen. Now what trips you when it comes to sin is that if you happen to run into people like Nichole, they will usually not admit that it is sin that is keeping them away from your church. For example, let's say the story had played out differently. Let's say that I was walking through town and I happened to run into Nichole herself. And here's Nichole who is living in sin, who had experienced just months before major life changed and been baptized in our church, had been in a small group, had been matched with a young lady to be her mentor and maybe I run into Nichole and she perhaps tries to avoid me, but I'm pretty hard to evade, and I finally shake hands with her and give her a hug, and I say—hey, I haven't seen you around the church for a while. It is very likely that Nichole would not admit that she moved back in with her boyfriend. That would be very difficult for her to express to me. Instead, she might make up some reason. She might just say—well, you know, The Journey was my very first church experience, and I thought it might be better if I visited a few other churches before I'm committed. Now, by the way, I'm not just making up that excuse, I have actually heard that excuse, someone comes to our church for the first time, they were formerly unchurched. They have fallen into some kind of sin. We catch up with them, and they make the excuse—well, I really want to

visit around to some other churches for a while. Or perhaps, Nichole would say—you know what, I'm a single mom and I've have a teenage daughter, and you guys don't have youth program at your church, and so I decided that I needed to get my daughter to a place where they had a youth program. And oh, by the way, Pastor Nelson, I'm sleeping with my boyfriend again. No, she's not going to tell you that. It's just not going to happen. You see a lot of times when people fall away into sin, they make up a reason that is palatable to give you for why they are leaving because they are embarrassed to tell you the truth. Now, this might be a good time for me to introduce you to one of my old philosopher friends named Blaise Pascal. And some of you know, I was a computer programmer for many years before going into the ministry, and there is actually a computer programming language named after Blaise Pascal. Pascal was a Christian philosopher back in the 1600-1700's and he was a mathematician, who also wrote about philosophy and also wrote about things of faith. And many of you who may have taken an introduction to philosophy perhaps have heard of Pascal's wager. Pascal had an evangelism method that I do not recommend, where he would invite you to wager based on the fact that there might be a God or there might not be a God. And he actually laid it out, and he would tell people that there are really only four options in life. There is a God and there is an eternity. There is not a God and there is an eternity. There is not an eternity, and there is a God. And there is not an eternity, nor is there a God. He would lay this out as a wager and he would say, based on that, based on there being only four options in life, I can tell you, it is better to believe in God than not. Now, did I just convince you that there is a God, based on that wager? Well, Pascal he thought that was very helpful. I never found Pascal's wager to be very helpful and I've certainly not felt it to be a tool of helping people come to faith in Christ, none the less, some of you may have studied Blaise Pascal, because of Pascal's wager. But there is another piece of the puzzle that Pascal discovered that I think is very, very direct and very, very insightful and still stands the test to today. That is what has been known as Pascal's Congruence Principle. Pascal posited that people have to live with congruence between their beliefs and their behavior. In other words, it's very difficult for me to go too long living in the way where my beliefs do not match my behavior. And so if I am behaving in a Godly way, I will soon adapt my beliefs in a Godly way. If I am behaving in an ungodly way, I will soon adopt and adjust my beliefs to an ungodly way. And honestly, this congruence principle has helped me understand why people leave church when they fall into sin. Let's go back to an example of this in the young lady I am calling Nichole. Nichole left our church to move back in with her boyfriend. Now, for the previous six or seven months, she had been growing in her beliefs.

She was a new Christian. She was a relatively young Christian, so to speak, and she had a lot to learn, but she was on the right path with her beliefs. And she was adjusting her behaviors accordingly. But you know, Nichole had 27 or 37 years of sinful experience under her belt. And so it was easy, unfortunately, for her to fall back into that old lifestyle. Perhaps she had an encounter with an old boyfriend, who knows what happened, but somewhere along the way she decided that it was okay for her to behave in such an incongruent way as to move back in with her boyfriend. And even though her beliefs were moving in the one direction, she put herself in the position where her behavior went in another direction. And so she could not live with that incongruence too long. Now for a while she could do it. In fact, the first Sunday after she moved in with her boyfriend, she may have come to church, but that tension was too great. So she skipped a few weeks. And maybe then she got up the courage to come back a month later. But again, the church simply reminded her of the incongruence in her life. And unfortunately, it was easier for her to change her beliefs than it was for her to change her behavior. And so she fell away from the church. She had left the church. Now, were our beliefs wrong at the church? Of course not. Was our discipleship process wrong at the church? Probably, not. Was Pascal correct about people needing to live with congruence between their behaviors and their beliefs? Absolutely. He was absolutely correct. You see, whenever someone is pulled back into that old way of sin, unless they have very strong beliefs in their life, or belief systems in their life, or people around them to help them, they will very quickly adjust their beliefs to match their new sinful behavior to which they are returning. So you say, how do you solve this problem? I've been very descriptive, how do you prescribe a solution to this problem? Well, this is probably the most difficult of all the reasons that we are going to look at in this resource. It is the most difficult one to address. It's the most difficult one to prescribe. But that gives me some thoughts on how to get people who have fallen into sin to stay at your church, to stick back with your church. The first thing—examine the culture of your church to make sure it is a culture of grace. It's a culture of grace. You see, the only way you can reach someone who has fallen back into sin is to teach them about grace. You see, it really is true when sin abounds, grace abounds even more. Instead of condemning Nichole, our church's responsibility was to extend grace to her. But the truth is, I have to create a culture of grace way before a young lady like Nichole comes to our church. And so you have to preach on grace. You have to teach on grace. You have to go above and beyond to talk about extraordinary, extravagant, over the top grace in your church. Because it's only when you have that kind of culture can the person who comes to church that falls back into sin will

ever be reclaimed again. And this starts with you. It starts with you as the leader of your church. You have to have an attitude, instead of asking people—where have you been? You extend to them a gracious welcome home. I think a great example of this in Scripture is the Prodigal Son. And when the Prodigal Son returned home, the father did not condemn the son, instead the father threw a party for the son. So we have to do that in our church. We have to create an atmosphere or culture where people who have been away from church for a while can come back without condemnation.

Now, number two, a second way that you can handle this prickly issue of people falling into sin is that you can keep the door open after they leave. Now this is an element of grace, of course, grace keeps the door open. Grace leaves the light on for the Prodigal Son. Grace stands at the door expecting the return of the sinner, every week. But grace also makes sure that the door is not slammed when they leave. Reminds me about that old saying about—don't let the door hit you where the good Lord split you when you are walking out the door. Well, when people walk out the door of your church, you don't want to slam that door behind them. That leads me to a controversial discussion about exit interviews. You know, many times when you hear someone talk about the topic that we are exploring in this resource, they will talk to you about exit interviews. Well, in my opinion, exit interviews are an absolute waste of time. You say—well, Nelson, tell us what you really mean. Well, what I really mean is that exit interviews are an absolute waste of time. Because if I had conducted exit interview with Nichole, she would never have admitted to me that she was living with her boyfriend, or at least the chances of that happening without a really bright light in some kind of interrogating room are pretty slim. But instead she would have come up with something that was palatable. She would have given me reasons for why she left, that she thought that I could accept. Well, you know, the people at the church, they are just a good bit older than me. Well, you know, I'm not really into that type of music. Well, you know, you really didn't have the kind of student ministry that I wanted. She would have come up with reasons that were palatable to me in order to get out of that exit interview situation but she would have never told me the real reason. And then, I would have made adjustments in our church based on false data. And it's my proposition without going into a two hour discussion on exit interviews, that the reasons that you get in an exit interview, the suggestions you receive in an exit interview, are actually based on false data. You say—well, what if we get the exit interviews anonymously? What if we did that? Well, think about it from a sin standpoint. Sin always wants to hide. If you have been in ministry long enough to realize that people do not always tell you the truth, but perhaps you understand what I

am talking about when I say—avoid exit interviews. Because exit interviews will bring the person whose being interviewed to a place where they are forced to be deceptive. It will be you to make decisions based on information received through deception, and I think this is the biggest reason of all, and exit interviews, think about the name, exit interviews close the door on someone from ever returning to your church. You see, if I hold an interview, an exit interview, with someone who leaves, think about how terribly difficult it is for that person to ever return. You know, I don't know if studies have been done on this in the corporate world or not, but my suspicion is even the corporate world where they talk about exit interviews, that the likelihood of a person who has gone through an exit interview, ever reapplies for a job with that company would be pretty slim. And I can tell you based on experience of having coached hundreds of pastors and having extensive experience in ministry, that when you conduct an exit interview with someone who has left your church, their chances of ever returning to your church are slim to none. Because you have simply closed the door. And now, it would be an embarrassment for them to return. Now it would be a major hurdle over which they have to climb to return. Now they would have to not only come back and repent of their sin that took them away from the church, they would have to say to you that all that stuff we told you in our exit interview was a lie. And so, I strongly suggest you do not conduct exit interviews. But instead, you leave the door open for them to return.

Now, let me tell you the rest of the story about Nichole. Nichole eventually did return to our church. And I never told her that I had a conversation with her friend that day on the street. I never told her that I found out that she was living with her boyfriend. Now, I did find out that she confessed this to one of her small groups, that she asked prayer of her small group leader, and once in a sermon on forgiveness, she did write on her Connection Card a prayer of forgiveness about her past sin. But I believe that by leaving the door open, not conducting an exit interview with her, created an atmosphere of grace. We allowed someone to fall into sin and then be restored in our church.

Now, there is one other thing that you can do with people who are leaving your church because of sin. And that is, you can keep them on your data base. Keep them in your data base. Now, as Nichole left, and I know I'm just using her as an example, but there are plenty of other examples that I could give you, but even though Nichole left our church, I continued to send her invites to our big days at The Journey. I continued to keep her on our email list and we have a weekly email newsletter that goes out. I continued to send out the general invites to her and to keep her updated on all that was going on in our church. We

kept her on the list. And from time to time, when we would pull the list of people in our church that we hadn't seen in a while, we would pray for her, because she was on that list. I honestly can't think of any reason why you would ever delete a name from your data base. You see, I could have gone back to the office that day after I had that conversation with Nichole's friend, and I could have said—pull Nichole's record. The birds have got her. The sun has scorched her. She has been choked out by the cares and tares of the world. Let's remove her from our data base. She is now a sinner and I could have put a big scarlet "A" on her data base record, and taken her out of our system. Now, by the way, I believe in a pure membership. I do not necessarily subscribe to a pure data base. I mean, if we had to take out all of the sinners from our data base, nobody would be left on that data base, including me. So I kept her on the data base, because I thought—maybe she will check email this week and decide to return. Maybe she will read that mailer next week and decide to return. I kept her on the list. Because I always hold out hope like that father desiring to see the Prodigal Son return, that today might be the day that she returns. And so it is with people in your church. Someone may fall back into alcoholism. Continue to keep them on your list. Continue to preach grace and let it be known that if there is a place where a former alcoholic can come to church, it's your church. Someone falls back into drugs. Let it be known that if someone falls back into sexual sin, let it be known that your church is a church of grace. You do not endorse the behavior. You do not encourage the behavior, but you embrace the person who returns to the Gospel. And you will do everything you can to help them get up out of that pit they have fallen into, that you will kill the fatted calf, you will bring out the ring for the finger, and you will restore them to Godliness if they are willing to return to God. You see, the only solution of sin, is grace. Preach grace. Leave the door open so that grace can flow out and then keep them on your data base so that they know grace is still being offered.

Now let's talk about the third reason people leave church and what can you do about it. So here's the third one:

3. Life interruptions. Something happens in their life that interrupts their normal routine. And so we all have this. We all have interruptions in our life and it affects everything. An interruption could be a marriage. An interruption could be a divorce. It's some kind of life change that happens. A new baby could be an interruption. Moving is probably the biggest interruption in America. I mean we are a mobile society and a large percentage of people move every year. So they have habits of Godliness in old city, but they moved and that

interruption has caused them to get out of those habits. I was recently at a business seminar and this was a seminar about marketing and about promotion and they had a speaker present who was involved in the magazine business. And he was talking about how the magazine business has been declining for a number of years and he said that one of the biggest challenges that face the magazine industry is interruption, that someone will subscribe to a magazine for years, but then an interruption happens. They go through a financial issue or have financial pressure and they can't afford to renew their subscription or maybe they moved to another city or move across town and that leads to an interruption. He said it is very hard for us to reclaim people after that interruption has happened. I thought about that. Here's a magazine that has been a part of someone's life for six, seven, ten years, and then they move and they just suddenly never get around to resubscribing to the magazine or changing the address on the magazine. I thought about that in my own life. I thought about different times when I moved and sometimes I would think about it and sometimes I wouldn't, because I had broken that habit. The interruption interrupted my habits and so I had to form new habits based on the new lifestyle choice that I had made. Well, if that happens in the magazine business, you can be sure and certain that it happens in the church world that people have these interruptions. Now, as you think about it, logically, there is good interruptions, there are positive interruptions and then there are negative interruptions. For example, a position interruption—having a new baby. That would be a positive interruption. Getting married, that would be a positive interruption. People perhaps, one person lived in one apartment, and the bride lived in another apartment and they got married, and they moved into a new house together. That can be an interruption. So instead of continuing the path of going to church like they always had, they say—we want to use, now, Sunday mornings to focus on us. And focus on our time. And they had these new habits that are the result of interruption, but unfortunately, they fall away from the church. Or they think about the new baby. The couple has the new baby and they are up late and they aren't getting any sleep and they aren't certain they want to take the new child out to church and be around the other kids and that becomes an interruption. You know, studies have shown that it takes 21 days to embrace a new habit, and an additional 21 days to personalize it. So within 42 days, new habits really begin to form in our lives. And so if you think about that, if someone misses church for a couple of months, they are on pattern, they have developed a habit that could possibly keep them out of church for six months or even a year. Then on the flip side of that, you could say—negative interruption, a bankruptcy, a foreclosure, a down sizing in the job, a move that they didn't want to make,

a divorce, a death in the family. Well, I am getting depressed just thinking about these negative interruptions. You think about that, now that's something that affects your life not just for 42 days, but that can affect your life for 42 weeks, and so now these interruptions have really pulled people away from the church. Here's an exercise that I want you to do. I want you to think through what are the good interruptions that people in my church face and what are the bad interruptions that people in our church face? This can be very different based on the churches that you serve. For example, we have a location, one of Journey locations, that for a season of time divorce was very common in that location. It was a bad interruption. I mean that church generally reaches people that are in their early 40's, that a lot of times they have kids that are going off to college, or kids that are moving out of the house for the first time, and we began to realize that these empty nesters were going through some problems, some negative interruptions, so in that particular location, we started thinking—how can we meet the needs of people who are going through that negative interruption of divorce? Now, if you flip that with our Journey location that at the same time was in the Village area, the east Village area of New York, and by the way, these locations if you are familiar with The Journey Church, you know we have multiple locations around, so by the time you listen to this resource, the location may not be called what I am calling it here, but we had a location that was in the east Village and that was primarily made up of college students. It was right across from New York University, which is one of the largest private universities in America, and so we reached a lot of young people at that location. Well, divorce per se among college students is pretty low. But we didn't know the issue in that church, and that is, we had a negative interruption of two people would start dating because they met at the church, and then they would break up and then one person would have to go to another church or sometimes both people would go to another church because they couldn't bare to come to Journey and recall the fact that's where they went with the person they had the hard break up with. It's funny how these things could be very different. And in some of our locations in New York, they experience the ups and downs of finances. Others don't. And as I have worked in our locations in Florida and California and different places where we have locations, it's interesting to see good interruptions and bad interruptions, and they are very different. So what are they in your area? You know, the first church that I pastored, that church in Charlotte, North Carolina, it was directly across the street from the Nascar Stadium. So Nascar season was sort of a, I don't know, was it a positive or negative interruption in our church? But it caused a problem. Churches that I have worked with in Florida sometimes, they deal with the snowbird issues. If you are in the north, or in

Canada, you might deal with that as well, in that you have snowbirds that depart from your city, or come to your city. So that could be an example of interruption. Here's a small one that we all deal with every year, and that's the time change. I mean the time change Sunday can be a bit of an interruption. And then, there are interruptions that you cause. These are not necessarily good, nor bad, but they are just simply facts of life. You change the service times. You move locations. You build a new building, and so that creates interruptions. You start or stop small groups. That can lead to interruptions in people's lives. And if you are dealing with a population that the death of a family member can be an interruption, or the death of a spouse can be a major interruption in someone's life. I was teaching this talk one day in a coaching network and somebody said—your own death. Well that can certainly be a major interruption, but I don't think there is much hope in ever reclaiming that person on this side of eternity. But there are all kinds of positive and negative interruptions. So you need to identify what they are. Now, how do you manage this?

Well, the first action step is to catch it early. If you can, catch the interruption early. So if you know and you can discover that someone is about to have a baby, instead of letting that be an interruption, in the lives of that young couple, let it be an opportunity for them to draw closer to the church. If you know that someone is going through a divorce, don't wait to follow up with that person, catch it early and let them know that you are praying for them. Extend that grace like we were talking about in the previous topic. But if you can catch it early, it seems like you are better able to deal with it. You see, you want to be a church that walks through the interruptions in people's lives. Now, I'll tell you, and I'll put it on this resource just so everybody can hear it, I've had this dream for a while that there would be some kind of network where when people leave my church and move to your community, I could somehow alert you. Now, because I work with tens of thousands of pastors in my network family, I do have advantage over just the average pastor. It is very common for me to receive an email from a couple of from our church that says—hey, we are moving to Minneapolis, or we are moving to Dallas, Texas, or we are moving to Oklahoma City, do you know a church there? And because there are so many people that are part of the ministry that I oversee, and so many people who have gone through my coaching networks or read my books, I have quite an extensive list of churches that I can recommend. But wouldn't it be cool if you received a notification from the Presbyterian in another state about the Presbyterians who have just moved to your state? And if we could walk with people through those interruptions, and if we can catch it early enough. Now one of the ways that you catch it early, is you listen to the grapevines in your church. I know we often think about

the grapevine as being negative, gossip is spread over the grapevine, but there are also grapevines where you can get positive news. So train your group leaders to give you positive news about someone's life. Train your group leaders to share with the staff and share with you when someone is getting married, or when someone is having a baby. And then at the same time, train your group leaders to share with you the tough stuff that they learn about their group members. And that is, have them let you know when someone loses a job. Have them let you know when someone is going through a divorce. Another way that you can get information from the positive grapevine is you can read the backs of your Connection Cards. If you are familiar with my material on Assimilation, you know I teach that you use a Connection Card and that is certainly designed to capture the information from first time guests, but it also is a tool for you to use to read prayer requests. So if you are reading the prayer request, and you are following up on that and you see that someone is about to go through or has gone through an interruption, reach out to them and walk through the interruption with them. And so those are ways that you can catch that, along the path and if you can catch it early enough, instead of it being an interruption it can be an opportunity for ministry.

And then, even if you don't catch it early, the second way that you can deal with this interruption is you can reach out to the person and encourage them. And let them know that you're available, and the church is still there and that you offer grace. So don't be afraid to reach out. Occasionally, I will hear about someone who lost their job and I hear about it too late. Well, I would reach out to that person and I would just apologize that it has taken me three months to realize that they lost their job, or it has taken me three months to realize they went through a divorce. I say—look, I want to encourage you to stay strong. The very thing you need most right now in your life is the church. Now, honestly, I learned about these interruptions a lot of time through looking at people's giving. Now, I know this is controversial and I deal with this in more detail in another resource that I have on Stewardship, but I examine once a quarter the giving of people in our church. And sometimes, as I examine the quarterly giving, I will see someone who gave last quarter, but hasn't given a dime this quarter. And I will realize that something has gone wrong in their life over the last three months. Now, I don't necessarily call them and say—hey, I was examining your giving record and I noticed that you haven't given anything over the last three months but that's enough for it to alert me to check in with them. And often when I check in with them I find out that they have gone through a divorce, or I find out that they have lost a job or I found out that they have gone through bankruptcy or their house

has been foreclosed on and I find out that there has been this negative interruption. And I apologize to them that it has taken me so long to discover this. And that I didn't hear about this earlier, but I let them know the church is there for them and then I make a strong encouragement for them to get back into church. And I literally look them in the eye or talk to them directly over the phone and I say—Joe, I know you have lost your job. And I know you feel distant from God, but I'm telling you, as your pastor, the very best thing that you can do is to be there on Sunday. So would you make me a promise that I will see you on Sunday? And oftentimes Joe does. He says—I can do it next Sunday or I can do it the Sunday after that. And I ask them to stay connected to the church in spite of the interruption that they are going through. Same thing with divorce. I was talking not too long ago to someone who went through a divorce and I did very much what I am talking to you about. It took me almost a year to learn that they had gone through this divorce. And I apologized to the person that I had not heard about that earlier, and I assured them of my prayers. And I looked him in the eye and said—I want you to get back in church. And he said—but Nelson, the Bible says that God hates divorce. And I explained to him that God doesn't like the results of divorce, that divorce hurts and it's harmful and it's like ripping apart two pieces of paper that had been glued together for eternity. But that doesn't mean that God hates divorced people. And I explained to him how this was an opportunity for him to grow and for him an opportunity to have something new in his life, and to get started back and to develop those new habits like we were talking about. And honestly, it wasn't the most encouraging conversation I have ever had, and I didn't leave feeling all that great about it, but now that I am some months away, I can see that he is making progress and he is getting back in church and growing in that way. And so you reach out to people who have faced these interruptions. Now, obviously, the best kind of interruption to reach out to is positive interruptions. Here, maybe you find out that someone has had a baby and perhaps you have found out two months later. Well, you can still deliver a baby gift. I have yet to meet a couple that doesn't like to receive a baby gift. Even if the baby is two or three months old. If you can catch it early, that's great. Certainly you want to reach out. But even with that, you can still reach out and encourage them. A couple that has been married, or a couple that has moved, you can still reach out.

Next, and finally in this section, you can utilize big days to reclaim people who have faced interruptions. Before I talk about the big day concept in general, let me say that there are different ways that you can work to stay in touch with people who have faced interruptions regarding a move. For example, if you direct mail in any way shape, or form, perhaps it's

getting letters, or perhaps it's promotions for special events at your church and that's why I put this under the topic of big days, from time to time, it's worthwhile to pay for first class postage. Now, in the church often we will do non-profit postage because it's cheap and it's good stewardship. But from time to time, it's important to do a first class mailing to your data base because when you pay first class postage, the postage will send you the updated addresses. And when you get those back and you realize that someone has moved, perhaps out of town, that would be a chance to reach out to them and encourage to find a church in their new city, or you find out that someone has moved across town, or you find out that they are no longer at that address that you have on file. That can be a warning light for you that there is a potential interruption ahead that is going to cause them to fall away. Now, back when I was talking about sin issues, I used the story of the Prodigal Son. And we talked about that a lot. When it comes to interruption, I think the better story is the story of the Lost Sheep. And that is, that Jesus willingly left the 99 and went after the lost sheep who had been interrupted the process, the flight had been interrupted in some way. So the sheep was outside of the pen and He went after them. So whenever you can discover that someone has faced an interruption and you can build systems in your church to discern those interruptions like a first class mailing, by all means, I encourage you to use those, because if you are going to recapture people through big days, you are going to need their most up to date mailing information. Now, let's talk about big days for a moment. If you have listened to any of my other resources, or utilized some of my books, you know I teach a concept called the Big Day. The Big Day is an all out push toward a single Sunday for the purpose of breaking a growth barrier and reaching new people for Jesus Christ. And so, Easter is a Big Day. The fall kick off is a Big Day. Sometimes, in the summer, you can create a Big Day. I often will create a Big Day in February. Well, these Big Days are natural points throughout the course of the church year, where you can really go after people that you haven't seen in a while. For example, on Easter, I will go back and I will pull the list of every first time guest we have had over the previous year that is no longer engaged at our church, connected to our church, and I will extend a special invitation to them. Whenever I get to the February Big Day, I will go back and pull people from the previous fall who may have moved, or maybe who have had some kind of interruption in their life and I will offer a special invitation to them. Not too long ago, I was working this process and there was a doctor in our town who I had been working on. And honestly, the doctor was living with his girlfriend. And no, he wasn't living with Nichole. I know you were thinking that from earlier, but no, he was living with his girlfriend and that had been part of the problem with

getting this guy connected. And he would come a couple of times, but then he knew he had this sin in his life, and he knew that if he was going to commit to this church, he would not be able to fully commit because of the congruence or incongruence in his life, as it would be. But I reached out to him about this Big Day. I called him on the phone and I said—hey, doc, we've got this Big Day coming up at the church and I'm just calling to extend my special invitation. And he said—I'd like to come on Sunday. And we chit chatted for a moment, and I said—what's going on in your life? And he said—man, I'm so glad you called. I've been going through a tough time. I have just broken up with, and he called his girlfriend's name. And they had been living apart for a couple of months, but that interruption in his life was actually a positive interruption, because he went from living in sin to now living as a single person again, and that was part of his path to getting reconnected. And so these big days can give you an opportunity to think about how you can reclaim some people that have been interrupted by good and bad situations. Now, I just want to say it to be clear, a Big Day is primarily designed to focus on new people. So, if you can only focus on one type of person with your Big Days, focus on reaching new people. But if you are able to do that 80/20 split, like we talked about earlier, then spend 80% of your time focusing on reaching new people for the Big Day, and 20% of your time reclaiming people who have gone through an interruption and faced a sin issue or any of these other reasons that we are going to talk about as we continue in this resource. But that's number three—a life interruption.

So here's the fourth reason that people leave your church, and there is actually only one solution to this one about what to do about it, but let's talk about number four—a bad experience.

4. A bad experience. Sometimes people leave because of a bad experience. We've all had this happen. It's someone we wanted to keep and something happens. It's not that that it is a poor fit. It's not that they have a sin issue in their life. It's not an interruption, they just had a bad experience. They had a bad experience with somebody in the church or they even had a bad experience with you. And we all know what I'm talking about—bad experiences. Somebody gets mad at somebody in the church. So there's two people in the church and they get into a great argument and they leave the church. In fact, back in the days when I traveled and spoke in a lot of different churches, I was walking out one Sunday night with the pastor. And he said—boy things went better this Sunday night than they did last Sunday night. I said—what do you mean? He said—well, last Sunday night, right there, and he pointed to a spot in the parking lot, he said, my chairman of the deacons and the co-chair got

into a fist fight right there last Sunday night. And that's a bad experience right there when the chairman and the co-chairman are getting into a fist fight in the parking lot. Well, sometimes bad experiences happen. Somebody has a bad experience in the children's area. Somebody has a bad experience with a small group. Somebody has a bad experience with somebody else in the church. I often will say to people that in every church a few weirdos must fall. And so there is always a weirdo who causes a problem. There is always someone who does something. Now occasionally, there are really bad experiences. Somebody has a bad experience. I don't really even want to go into that on this resource, but it's a legal issue and they have a bad experience and somebody does something to them illegally. The truth is, you may never be able to reclaim that person who has had a bad experience. A really bad experience. But if they get mad about something, if they have been ticked off about something, if they get upset about something, if they are mad at you because you didn't call, or because you didn't show, or their group didn't do this, or they felt weird about that, or they didn't like the color of this, or whatever, if it's that kind of bad experience, if it's in the range of normal bad experiences, I do think that you can reclaim people who maybe have gone through that. Now, what one idea in reclaiming people here, is you want to create an atmosphere where it is understood that nobody's perfect. I'm not perfect, and you're not perfect and I should never give the illusion to anybody in the church that I am. So we want to create an atmosphere, where we say that we are a church made up of imperfect people. Now, the Bible uses the analogy that the church is a family. So let me ask you—if you are part of a family, if you have brothers and sisters, or if you had an extended family, and we all do, did you get along with everybody in your family? Well, of course not. And when my brothers and I we would get into arguments, my Mom and Dad and I we get into arguments, I didn't disown my family just because I had an argument. Well, people understand that's how the church is. You don't have to leave the church just because everything didn't go your way. Now there are people who will do that. And maybe there is no possibility to reclaim them. But if it's just everyday normal disagreement kind of stuff, help them understand that part of being the family means making allowances for each other's faults. And that is really what the Bible says is part of the family makeup as well, that we make allowances for each other's faults. And so you have to teach this and you have to stay on this and you have remind people of this. And I often will say to our people in our church, if there is anybody who is here that is perfect, please don't stay around our church too long, because you are going to ruin it for everybody else, because we are an imperfect church, made up of imperfect people doing our best to serve a perfect Savior. So, we really need to work hard to

understand that bad experiences are going to happen. It's impossible to get through life without bad experiences. So one thing is, you want to create a culture where people understand and people are quick to offer forgiveness, and offer to make allowances. At the same time, you want to be quick to seek forgiveness if you were the source of the bad experience. And so, teach people to forgive and to be forgiven. And so, there may be conversations that you need to have. Because you see, if things aren't clear at the top, things are going to be cloudy in the church. And if you don't keep the air clear between you and the people of your church, then you can never expect the people in your church to forgive each other. And so, if you know that there is a situation where you need to go and seek forgiveness, then by all means, do that. Now the Bible says—as much as possible, live at peace with one another. So this means that you go to the person and you ask for their forgiveness. Now, whether they give it or not, whether the situation is restored or not and whether peace comes or not, that's not your issue. Your issue is to do what Jesus says which is—if you are at the altar and you suddenly remember that your brother has something against you, not even that you have something against them, that the brother has something against you, you are to go and seek to be reconciled about that. So, that means if you did something that you know hurt somebody else, you go and seek to make peace, but it also means that if you know somebody is holding something against you, you go and make peace. Now, you don't do this quickly, you don't do it cautiously and you do it prayerfully. You might want to read the book, *The Peacemaker*. That would be one that I would recommend to you. You might want to read R. T. Kendall's book, *Total Forgiveness*, as part of this process. But making peace and keeping peace so that you take those bad experiences, those fires that are there in your church, and you add water to the fire as opposed to adding gasoline to the fire. Now, part of teaching this inside of your church is to help people understand that people are imperfect, and that as Christians, we give up our right to be offended. When you learn to give up your right to be offended, that creates tremendous harmony in your church and so in some ways this idea of people leaving over bad experiences, it is a theological issue. It is an application issue of Scripture. But it is one that I think of all the ones we have talked about can be overcome. You know, the truth is, if you do anything worthwhile for God, there are going to be some people who are mad at you. So my advice to you is to make sure that people who get mad at you are the right people who get mad at you. I mean, not the people inside of the church, because sometimes people have a bad experience because they didn't have enough information. Sometimes, they have a bad experience because they didn't have enough communications. Sometimes, they have a bad

experience because they don't feel like they have been heard. Sometimes, they have a bad experience because somebody did do something evil to them. Sometimes, they have a small bad experience and if you deal with it, it can keep from becoming a large bad experience. Now, as much as you can, deal with these situations. One of the big lessons I have had to learn as a leader is summed up in three words—run to conflict. I have had to learn to run to conflict. This doesn't mean I spend all of my time asking forgiveness and begging forgiveness because sometimes people are mad at me and I didn't do anything wrong. So I can deal with that, I can talk to them about that, but the truth is we have to agree to disagree. And I do spend 80% of my time focused on reaching new people. I look for new people I can upset as opposed to trying deal with the old people I have upset. No, I'm just kidding about that. But I do as much as possible trying to live at peace with that. And when there is conflict, I run to that because the devil will use that conflict to keep God's church from growing. Now, there is a lot of study that you can do in this, and there is further follow up that you can do, but just understand it's a bad experience that keeps people, that causes people to leave, and it's forgiveness that can cause them to stay.

So let's look at the fifth reason that people leave church and what you can do about it. And this is a big one. I'm going to tell you, I want to thank you for staying on with me on this resource to this point. And really, if I had to highlight one that is above all the others, when it's a problem that you can solve, I would say this number five, is probably the easiest one for you to solve. And so here's the fifth reason that people leave church:

5. Isolation. I'm so lonely. Isn't that an old Frank Sinatra song? I'm so lonely. Maybe that's a country music song. I'm so lonesome I could cry. That's an old country music song. Well, sometimes people in your church are so lonesome that they just leave. In my book, *Fusion*, I talk about how you have seven minutes to make a first impression. Well, the truth is, you have seven weeks to give people friendships at your church. Or else they will leave. And so people who do not build friendships at your church within seven weeks of attending, they will leave. Or if they have been around your church for a while, but an interruption or a sin issue causes their friends to leave, and they don't make new friends, then they will end up leaving your church as well. Now the flip side of that is, and this is very positive news, if people in your church have friends in the church, they will endure almost anything. If someone has a friend in the church or multiple friends in the church they will stay with you with changes in style, changes in structure, changes in service times, changes in location, changes in leadership, changes in you name it, they will stay with you if they have friends in

the church. So in many ways, Christian fellowship is the glue that holds a church together. Now, I studied very strongly the Purpose Driven Church by Rick Warren. And Rick Warren talks about a church that is healthy is balanced around the five purposes—worship, evangelism, discipleship, fellowship and ministry. And if you have never read Rick’s book, The Purpose Driven Church, I strongly encourage to do so. But the truth is, of all the purposes that we have talked about, worship, evangelism, discipleship, fellowship and ministry, the one that is the least discussed in churches is fellowship. And so in a lot of churches there is a lack of fellowship, true Biblical fellowship. And I mean, think about your life—did you have a course on fellowship in seminar? Have you ever read any books on fellowship? Now, in my thinking of the eight systems of the church, fellowship falls strongly into the assimilation area of the church, and into the assimilation system of the church and into the small group system of the church. So three of the eight systems have a strong component of fellowship and I could argue even leadership and perhaps one other system would have a strong area of fellowship as well. So, fellowship is very, very key. And if a person in your church fails to find Biblical fellowship, they are gone. They are not going to stay. So, this problem is easy to solve from here on out, it’s hard to solve in the past. I mean it’s very hard to go to someone and say—I want to apologize that you didn’t make friends at our church and please forgive me that that didn’t happen and come back. It’s kind of hard to reclaim people who have fallen away because of isolation. Now, it’s not to say that you shouldn’t try. You can do the Big Day and you can actually treat isolation as an interruption and you can go back and listen to the section on interruption and see all the things that you can do there. But for here forward, I think it is important for you to build a culture where nobody goes to church alone. Nobody lives life alone. But everybody has someone who is praying for them, someone who knows them, someone who cares about them, and someone who loves them in Jesus Christ. And if you haven’t done so, I would strongly encourage you to study my other resources on Assimilation. The Assimilation Seminar and the Assimilation Intensive. One of the things that I say at the end of the Assimilation Seminar is that whether you adopt my assimilation system or not, at the end of the day, if you want to assimilate people in your church, you have to give them relationships and responsibilities. So I want you to get those two “R’s” here. A person that has a relationship with someone in the church that has a responsibility at the church is never going to feel isolated. You see people feel isolated when they think—I don’t have anything to do, and I don’t have anybody who knows me. But if they have someone who knows them, and something to do, they feel connected and that’s the opposite of isolation. It’s embraced. It’s

true Biblical fellowship. So, how do you solve this as a pastor? Well, one thing is you need to preach on the Biblical fellowship. You need to have sermons on Biblical fellowship. You say—what is Biblical fellowship? Biblical fellowship is the process of going from being a stranger to being a guest to being an adopted member of the family. And if you look at that throughout Scripture, if you study how God turns strangers into family members, you can find that all throughout Scripture and you can preach on that. And you can think about the culture of your church and is it a church that welcomes people and embraces people, and certainly preaching of grace like we talked about earlier, is going to bleed over into this idea of fellowship. But then, Rick Warren told me one time, he said—Nelson, if you want to take the temperature of a church, put the thermometer in the pastor's mouth. So let me ask you—how are you doing at embracing people? The first person that a newcomer is going to make a connection with is the person preaching. And so when you are preaching, are you taking advantage of the first and last 15? Are you out during the first 15 minutes of your service meeting people? Are you out during the last 15 minutes of the worship service meeting people? And it's amazing how many people you can connect with during the first 15 minutes of the service, and the last 15 minutes of the service. And you know what I've learned is some pastors will tell me, I can't go out and shake hands during the first 15 minutes of the service. I need to be working on my message. Well, listen, if you are still working on your message, if you don't have that complete, it's not going to be a good message, and so you need to go out there and get as many people on your side as you can. You say—maybe you need to meet as many people as you can and maybe they will give you grace because the message is not complete. But now the truth is, you can control the fellowship spirit of your church by meeting people, by introducing people, by connecting people, so it starts with you. Then it goes to your leaders, and then it goes down into the different areas of your church. And then, in particular, there are three areas of your church that can help people build relationships and find responsibilities. So here's those three. (1) Fun events. Have enough fun events throughout the course of your calendar year that attract people who are new to your church, who may feel isolated in your church so they can get connected. Now, fun events are just one time events. They are very low entry, low requirement kind of events. You basically just show up and you do something together under the church's banner you have fun. A fun event could be going to a ball game together. A fun event could be going to a Fourth of July picnic together. Or going to see the fireworks in the park on the Fourth of July. A fun event could be going to a big movie together. But when you have these fun events, you look for people who are new to your church, or maybe you

look for people who have gone through an interruption and you specifically invite them to attend. Now, it's open to the whole church, but you might particularly invite people who are not as connected in your church. For example, whenever I do fun events at The Journey, I will often pull a list of all of our first time guests from the previous month and invite them to the fun event. Or there are certain fun events that we do that I might pull lists of everybody who is not in a small group right now and invite them to go to those fun events. We have some really great fun events at the bowling alley, or at the football field, where we just go and have fun but then fellowship naturally occurs. And if you've got some people in your church who are connector types, the kind of person who has never met a stranger, the type of person who can talk to the wrong member for 30 minutes, you know that kind of person, get them to help you at these fun events, and that way they make sure everybody gets connected. So fun events can be really powerful connection times at your church and then if you use that fun event as a spring board for other connections to occur, that can help solve the isolation problem. (2) Now, another solution to the isolation problem is service teams. If you can build a system in your church like the Assimilation System that I talk about and Ministry System that I talk about, where people quickly get involved in serving, that will solve the isolation problem as well. Now, at The Journey, my goal is to have between 40 and 50% of our regular attenders and members serving one hour a week or more. So we have a lot of positions that are entry level serving positions. And by serving positions, I mean volunteer positions, ministry positions in your church. Simple volunteer positions like coming to the office and helping us with data base clean up, or helping us with office projects, more in depth serving opportunities by being involved with one of our teams like working in the kids' ministry, which is a high commitment and high qualification team, or serving on the worship arts team, or serving in the ushers and greeting team and things like that. But do you have positions in your church that are open for new people to serve? Open for people to just show up and get involved? Now, you know when people serve together, they grow together. They get connected. They meet one another and that solves the isolation problem. And then (3) would be small groups. The real key to solving the isolation issue in your church is a strong small group system. Now there is a lot of different small group systems out there. The small group system that I teach is called the Free Market Semester Based Small Group System. And it's designed to get you 100% of your adults in small groups. There is a small group system that is very popular that generally averages about 50% of your adults. There are other small group systems out there that will get you 30%. But I want to build a small group system where no one is left behind, where every person is involved in a

small group. And so, small groups for me are the very best place for relationships to occur. Now, I want to be clear. You can't promise that friendships will occur in small groups. It may or may not occur. But you can promise that if they are going to occur, small groups are the best place for them to occur. Because small groups are the place where people can go and meet other people who are on similar spiritual journey and then out of that small group environment, true deep friendships can occur. But I can promise this, Biblical fellowship can begin inside of a small group. Because a small group is where fellowship can be birthed. It's where we can pray for one another. It's where we can get to know one another's names. Like the old television—I want to go where everybody knows my name. And small groups are a place where people can start serving and take an active responsibility inside the church. And then finally small groups are a place where people make commitments. And if you use a small group covenant, like I teach, then this can occur inside of a small group environment. So, isolation is a real deal.

Now, there are two types of people in your church. There are introverts, and there are extroverts. Introverts and extroverts. The latest study I saw was that over 65% of Americans are introverted. Now, I actually think it's probably higher than that. They were just afraid to tell you because they don't like taking surveys. They are introverts, and that's the problem. But it seems to me like the people who show up at our place are far more introverted than extroverted. I would say that it is more like 80% vs. 20%. But the problem is a lot of our programs in our churches are designed for the extroverts, not the introverts. So I want you to think about that. Are you forcing people to take too much initiative to meet friends at your church? Are there ways that you could extend special invitations for people to make friends? Are there environments that you could create that would be less intimidating for the more introverted people? Are you personally going out of your way to speak to the person who maybe feels like a stranger or feels like they are brand new to your church or feels a bit isolated? Are you keeping your eye on the people who are on the peripheral of your church? Are you examining those not in a small group and following up with them to make sure they stay connected and feel connected? To go back to something earlier, are you cutting off people from your data base and cutting off people from your mailing list just because they have chosen to isolate themselves? But you can still reach out and you can embrace them, and you can check in with them. Do you have a system where you go down the membership roll of your church every year and check in with people to make sure they are staying connected and getting connected? Are you challenging people from the stage to overcome that initial hesitancy to get involved with a group or get involved

with a service table, or go to some kind of a fun event? These things make a big difference in the lives of people. Because really, of all of the issues we have talked about, next to the sin issue, nothing breaks my heart more than to see somebody walk away from the church because they feel isolated. But the truth is, this is a problem that we can solve with the right spirit, with the right prayer, with the right teaching, with the right system in place. So I hope this will help you solve that isolation problem so that never again does anyone leave your church because they didn't build a relationship or they didn't find a responsibility.

So here's the last of our reasons of why people leave church and what you can do about it. This is number six, that I have deliberately saved this one for last because it's pretty fun to teach on. And it is...

6. Boredom. People leave church over boredom.

Now, before we look at that, let's just review where we have been. We talked about people leave church because of a poor fit. And that's okay if your church doesn't fit their style or the structure they want. Bless them, recommit to your vision, examine your promotion. We have talked about sin and how some people fall back into sin. We looked at Pascal's Incongruence Principle, so you keep preaching grace. You leave the door open. You keep them on your list. Then we looked at interruptions. Good and bad interruptions. You want to catch it early, reach out and encourage them to come back or to stay, and utilize Big Days. Then we dealt with bad experiences and how you, once again, preach on grace and preach on the church as a family. And you take the initiative to apologize and you run to conflict. Then in number five, just a moment ago, we looked at isolation. And how you help people find relationships and responsibilities and you get them involved in service teams, in fun events, and small groups. You build a church where extroverts find friends.

Then now, finally, there is the issue of boredom. Sometimes people just leave your church because they get bored. Now, I'll be the first to admit that I feel this way sometimes. I sometimes get bored at church. I sometimes get bored during my own sermons. Well, that is really bad. I wonder how long they have been bored if I get bored during my own sermons. But all kidding aside, just think about it for a moment. Church can become routine. I mean it's the same three songs, the offering is at the exact same place, the sermon is ends the exact same way. We go out with the same music, and it's just routine after routine after routine. Now, there is nothing wrong with routine. In fact, one of the things that church provides people is a routine. Church provides a consistent structure. And we need to be

there every week. We need to be there every week for ladies like Nichole or like this other guy I was talking about who gone through the divorce or the doctor I was telling you about earlier. That is one of the beautiful things about church is we are there every week offering help, hope, healing and the Gospel to people when they need it. So, there is something about routine, but the problem with routine is if we go to church out of duty, pretty soon that duty will turn in and we will lose the delight. And so instead of being delighted about this, it becomes a duty that we go through and it becomes a routine that we go through. And if you think about it, if you look back over the last year at your church, there has been a lot of routine in your church. I once had the opportunity to see a man come to Christ in the very first church that I pastored. And as I was talking to him before he made that decision and step across the line. He said—Nelson, if I walked into (and he called the name of the church), at 11:20 this Sunday morning, I can tell you exactly what you guys will be doing because when I went to that church 20 years, that's what you did at 11:20. And he was right. The church had not changed at all at 11:20 we would be receiving the offering and the choir would be about to sing, and then I would have gotten up to preach after. Same choir, same process, different preacher, same routine. Now, thank the Lord that guy eventually did come to faith in Christ, and he eventually was baptized in our church and his life was changed, but that idea of church being boring or it being routine was one of the things that was keeping him from church but it's also one of the things that causes people to leave the church. Now, in this area, we have to walk a tightrope. It's the tightrope between consistency and variety. Between consistency and variety. On one side you want to be consistent. You want to be there every week. The Word needs to be preached every week. There is probably going to be singing every week. There needs to be consistency. If you follow what I teach in the Assimilation Seminar, you know that I teach you every week to do a consistent Connection Card. It's consistent. You say it the same way every week, you do it the same way every week, you collect it the same way every week. It's consistent. But that consistency has to be tied in with variety. I mean, if you think about it, in the human way of living there is consistency in our life but there is also variety. I eat breakfast every morning. I don't eat the same thing every morning. Or even if I eat the same thing most mornings, I still like a little variety. The same thing with lunch. I eat lunch around the same time every day, but there is some variety in my lunch. Now, I'm consistent in when I do the things that I do, but there is some variety inside of there. Now, there is more consistency than there is variety. So that's how it is in the church. You don't have to have variety every single week. In fact, a lot of churches fall into the trap of trying to compete against themselves

every week. And so the way to put down boredom is not to just try to be bigger and better and more enthusiastic every week, it's just to add some spice of variety throughout the course of the year. Now, you say—well, people shouldn't leave when they are bored. Well you know what, there are a lot of things people shouldn't do. But if you have ever been to a baseball and it gets boring, people leave. If you have ever been to a football game and it gets boring, people leave. You see, this talk is not about what people should do, it's about what people do. And they do leave because it gets boring. They are looking and they hear about an exciting church down the street, and they hear about something that is going on Sunday mornings that is more exciting than what you are offering on Sunday mornings. And here, I'm not even talking about another church because really, we don't compete with other church, we compete with everything else they could do on a Sunday morning. And so when it gets boring, people start zoning out. And at our church, we hand out pens. I happen to have a pen here in the studio that has our church name on it. And sometimes when I'm up teaching, I will be about 20 minutes into the message and I start hearing the click of the pens, and I know that's a sign that I lost the audience because if they are clicking their pens, they are ready for me to end the message. Well, the thing is, people do click their pens when they get bored. They do look at their watch when they get bored. They do yawn when they get bored. And if you do that enough over time, they will leave. Now to reiterate what I said earlier, I don't think every week you have to outdo yourself. You see week after week there should be great consistency. You can't expect major life change in someone's life every single week. Instead, it is a game that's won by inches. Little by little, inch by inch, that's what we are trying to do. That's how people grow in Christ. But occasionally, there needs to be something that people look forward to or that people do not expect. You see, I can endure a long, boring, consistent drive, if I know I'm getting to our destination. So I can deal with the same week after week after week if I know that Easter is coming. I can deal with the same week after week after week, if I know that the Big Day is coming. I deal with the same week, after week, after week, if somewhere in there, you challenge me. Or I can deal with the same week, after week after week, if all of a sudden the unexpected happens. So, let's talk about how we can deal with boredom.

First is: utilize Big Days. Utilize Big Days. Now I introduced you to the concept of the Big Day in one of our earlier steps but I just want to remind you that a Big Day is an all out push toward a single Sunday for the purpose of breaking a growth barrier and reaching people for Jesus Christ. But a Big Day can also interrupt the routine. Now, throughout the calendar year, inside of the church, we have a number of set Big Days. For example, Easter should be

a Big Day. And so as you are going through the routine of services in January and February and March, that can be a time for people to look forward to Easter, because they know Easter is going to be something special. And Easter interrupts the boredom. A Christmas service can do the same thing. A Mother's Day service can do the same thing. So you can put these Big Days throughout the course of the year. A February service can do that. Or you can create other Big Days that you have throughout the year and you give people something to look forward to. You know, people can endure almost anything if they know that there is something good that is coming up. So the Big Days give you a chance to do that. So I hope you will continue your study of Big Days and take a look at the Evangelism Seminar, the Ignite Seminar and other resources that I have on the Big Day.

But now, another way to utilize the Big Day is to make it unplanned and that's number two, which I would call random exciting things. How's that for a very precise term? Throughout the course of your year, include random but exciting things in your worship service. You say—what do you mean by that, Nelson? Random but exciting things. Well, you don't have to announce that you are going to plan a special song, but you do it. I was at a church not too long ago and the pastor was teaching on career issues and how to love God through your job. And the band walked out that morning and they kick into—Take this job and shove it, I ain't working here no more. You know that old song? And everybody just had a smile on their face because we walked in expecting, and at this particular church we were going to stand and we were going to sing the worship song just like normal, and they kicked in into "Take this job and shove it" and it was just a little bit of excitement right there in the middle of the message. Another time, at a church service I was in, the pastor was teaching and he had someone come out and give a great testimony. And it was just exciting to hear their testimony. Nobody knew they were giving the testimony. And then as they walked off, he made an announcement that they had just heard the news that they were going to have a baby. And that was exciting as part of that service. And it's just these little moments of excitement that you can program into your preaching calendar, or into the worship services that breaks up that boredom. I've walked out on stage with strange props and open with that. I once walked out on stage with a big heart shaped balloon that was connected to a very large \$100 bill. I talked about where your money goes there your heart goes also. I have a pastor friend who walked out on stage one time, soaking wet. And he delivered an entire message soaking wet about baptism. He challenged people to get dunked, as it might be. Sometimes instead of going to the sermon, we go to a video of me teaching somewhere on the street, just something that adds a little excitement. Now again, I'm not saying

that you have to do this every week. But could you do this five times a year? Or seven times a year? Or once a month? That would be enough to have some unexpected, random excitement in the worship service. I have been to churches where they flip it sometimes. Like once a year they flip it and have preaching first and then the music second. If that's done right that can be really powerful. We had a situation one time where someone was supposed to come and speak, and at the last minute, they couldn't make it. And so, my associate pastor and I, we just pulled chairs out on stage and we had just an impromptu conversation about the topic that the speaker was supposed to address that day. You know, it was different, and not something that we would want to do every week. He had his Bible and I had my Bible, and we had two or three verses that I wanted to talk about and he had two or three verses that he wanted to talk about, and it just sort of broke up the routine. It's like the churches these days that allow people to submit questions in the middle of the service and it just breaks up the routine. And this can be very powerful. Also, this can cause growth that routine cannot bring. Excitement sometimes opens people up to grow in an area where they wouldn't grow with routine.

Then the last one, my favorite way to overcome the problem of boredom is through challenges. That is throughout the year you put forth a big challenge from the pulpit. A big challenge that I often put forth on Easter is I look people in the eye on Easter Sunday, and I say—you made the decision to be here on the greatest day in the Christian calendar, Easter Sunday. But I want you to challenge you to be here for the next six Sundays, and I tell them what I am going to be teaching on over the next six weeks. And I will even have them check it on the back of their Connection Card and say—I accept the six week challenge to be here for the next six weeks. In the fall, when we start our small groups, often our small groups will study the same thing that we are teaching on throughout the year. And I will say—I want to challenge you to be here for the next two months to go to your small group without missing it and to be in service on Sunday, without missing it if at all possible for the next two months. Or sometimes if I am preaching on finances, I will give a tithe challenge, and I will preach a message a message on finances and I will challenge people to tithe for four months. It's called the Four Month Tithe Challenge, and you have heard me talk about that on some of our other resources. And this can shake people out of their boredom because you challenged them. Not too long ago, I was preaching a message and I was talking about the power of words, and talking about how people use their tongue and how the Bible says that the tongue has the power of life and death and I challenged people to go 30 days without cursing. And I had them write on their Connection Card the 30 Day No Cursing Challenge.

And to my surprise, 100 people in our church did that just in this one particular service. And I followed up with them over the course of that month and told them I was praying for them and gave them encouraging Scripture along the way. It sort of shook them out of their routine and it was amazing to see how people grew through just that simple challenge and that caused them to want to stay. So you have different types of challenges throughout the year. Now, you can't put out a big challenge every week. Now I do invite people to give their life to Christ every week. That's a challenge for those who don't know Christ, and then sometimes I challenge people in their finances. Sometimes I challenge them with their words. Sometimes I challenge them to stay faithful. Sometimes I challenge them in the groups. Sometimes I challenge them to join a group if there are introverts that we were talking about earlier. Sometimes I challenge people to go to a play group. Learning how to look your congregation in the eye and extend a big challenge is a very powerful leadership skill and it will help you when it comes to breaking this hole away from your church called boredom.

Well, we have looked at the six big reasons that people leave church. And I have talked to you about practical ways that you can deal with it. And the truth is, if we looked at all the ways and all the reasons that people give for leaving churches, this would be an unlimited resource. I mean, as I said in the beginning, 20% of the time who knows why people leave churches. There are many reasons why people leave churches as there are people who have left churches. But 80% of the time, I believe it's one of these six identifiable reasons and as you can see, there is very specific things you can do to close that back door and to keep people at your church. And I want to encourage you not to spend all of your time doing this. Spend 80% of your time reaching new people. I know that sounds kind of weird for me to say after you have just invested a large amount of time listening to this resource. But spend 80% of your time trying to reach new people. But then, set aside some time, a little bit of time, 20% of your time, to think through how you can keep people and how do you keep people from leaving your church. I think that can be a really powerful growth engine for you, as well. Because again, growing churches spend 80% of their time reaching new people, and only 20% of their time trying to reclaim people who have left, stagnant churches spend 20% of their time reaching new people and 80% of their time trying to reclaim people who have left. I also hope this resource has given you some handles for why people leave. And maybe now that you have those handles and you understand the reasons, the next time somebody leaves because they are not just a good fit for your church, it's not going to be as emotionally harmful or as emotionally hurtful as it would have been if you had not listened

to this resource. Maybe as you listen to this resource with your staff or even share some of what you have learned in this resource with your family, that will be an encouragement to them to say—you know what? People leave. People do leave. And sometimes they leave for the right reasons, and sometimes they leave because they need to leave for a time, but we have to keep the door open and we can continue to pray for them, and hope that they come back. And then I hope this resource will also help you know where to put your focus. I hope you found some things that you can do to create a culture of grace, a culture of fellowship, a culture where strangers are turned into guests, and guests are adopted into the family. I hope this resource has made you a better leader. Better at articulating at what is going on in your church. It's given you a deeper understanding of the dynamics of what is going on in your church and maybe just maybe, you have reached the point where sometimes good people can leave but it's not going to distract you from the people that God wants you to reach. Instead, it will strengthen your vision and strengthen your calling and allow you to focus on the next person that God has for you down the line. So, I hope this resource will be a conversation starter. I hope it will be an encouragement to you. I look forward to hearing your feedback and feel free to contact me at any of the emails or websites that are on this resource or reach out to where you purchased this resource, or just contact me directly at The Journey Church. I hope we can continue to have this conversation. Thank you for listening. Thank you for making it all the way to the end and not leaving me half way through this resource. God bless you as you lead your church.

BONUS 1

Hi, this is Nelson Searcy. I'm still in the studio. I just finished up the recording of why people leave church and what to do about it. So now joining me here in the studio is our producer for this resource, Scott Whittiker. And so Scott, welcome.

Hi, how are you doing, Nelson?

I'm doing good. Scott says that while I was doing this resource, he thought of some questions that he had for me, so what you are going to hear over the next couple of bonus MP3, bonus tracts is, you are going to hear unscripted, unanticipated and dare I say, dangerous questions from Scott because you are being very careful not to show me that sheet of paper, you've got these questions written on.

These are some questions that just came to mind as I was listening to the resource

and being here with you in the studio. So I thought, it might be helpful if some of the guys, maybe they have some of these same questions. And it would be just a great opportunity to kind of pick your brain a little bit.

Okay. Well, you have heard the best, I don't know what the edited version will be. We recorded about three or four hours, so whatever it ends up being, you have heard the best that I've got on the resource, but I will do my best to answer these and I'm a little nervous. So let's get started.

Alright. The first one that I thought I would throw at you is the reasons for not doing exit interviews.

Well, I don't, I mean what gave you the thought I do not like exit interviews?

You mentioned it a couple of times, I think. Maybe I need to get the resource after this thing is all put together and relisten to it. But. . .

I think the exact words were—I do not like exit interview.

There you go.

There are companies out there that you can actually hire and go in and study people who have left your church, but I think that is absolutely worthless. It's a waste of money. So what was the question again?

What are the reasons for not doing exit interview? I would imagine a lot of pastors are probably well convinced of that. It's maybe some of their leadership is trying to point them in that direction. So how can we help equip these guys to not do it?

That's good. Well, first of all, exit interviews as a tactic is really an HR issue, a human resource issue in corporations, and really it's a legal function. Corporation often will do an exit interview so that after someone leaves they can't say they left because of discrimination policies or because of harassment issues, or because of that. So the whole idea behind exit interviews was really designed to protect the company from lawsuits or from ill will after somebody left. I really don't think that's what we are about in the church. So, I think as much as we can learn from business practices, this is not an area that I would suggest we learn from. Because if you think about it, somebody has left the church. Say you had a couple in your church, and let's just say their names are Scott and Kelly. To me,

that's Scott's wife's name.

Ok. I think I know where you are going to go with this. Go ahead.

Well, let's just say Scott and Kelly have left your church and so maybe you don't go over, but it's really attempting for even you to do it, but maybe some well meaning deacon or leader in your church goes over to meet with them and maybe they left church because they really just don't like the looks of the senior pastor. I went to a church one time and we were visiting from out of town and my wife said—there is no way I could go to that church. His voice just grates on me. Now, I don't know, maybe something was wrong with her ears. I thought the guy's voice was fine, but he was little high pitched, but honestly, she just could not deal with this guy's voice. So let's just say that's the situation. Scott and Kelly have decided they don't like the church because the pastor's voice is too high, or they don't like the way he looks or who knows what. Some silly issue like that. So then this well meaning deacon sits down or, God help us, the high pitched pastor who is not that pretty sits down, and he says—you know, it would really be helpful to us, and meaningful to us if you could give us some feedback on why you left the church. And maybe it was something we could do because we really want to reach people like you in the future. Well, you guys kind of make eyes at each other like, I can't tell him it's the fact that his voice grates on my ears like nails on a chalkboard, and I can't tell him he's got the perfect face for radio. So you kind of look at each other, and Scott you kind of come up with something. You say—well, you know, we are just really more into contemporary music. And then Kelly jumps in—contemporary music. That's really what it is. We are just contemporary music. So you know, this church has been the piano and organ kind of church, with the big choir, and so maybe he goes back and the next week, he has a meeting with the other leadership and he says—what we need to do is start a contemporary service because people like Kelly and Scott out there, have want contemporary services. And so then this church ends up investing six months and \$6,000 or more to develop a contemporary service based on poor information they received from this exit interview. And my experience is that 90% of the time, the people in your church don't really know what to tell you. They just tell you something. Because they don't want to make the pastor mad. They don't want to say—hey, your voice just grates on me, just rubbing my knuckles across a cheese grater. They don't want to tell you that. They don't want to say that it is something that it really is. They don't want to say what it is. So they don't really want to tell you the truth because they don't want to speak ill of the church. Then if they do speak ill of the church, is that something we can really do anything about anyway. Can the

pastor go to a voice therapy or smoke cigars and try to get it to be a deeper voice? I don't know. So you see how that works, it's really not just a great place to collect information. And I will be honest Scott, I feel about the same way about the other large research projects that are based on people in the church rating where they are spiritually and rating their maturity. And I just don't know that people can really articulate why they grow in their faith and if they can really articulate why they leave, or if they can articulate why they love a church or don't love a church. I mean, I could be dead wrong on this, but that's my reason on it.

I have thought of a really good one liner on that. People don't like to talk bad about the church and if they do, you ought to beware. Just, there is something about that when we force people to do it. When we talk about exit interviews, you also mentioned, Nelson, about people not being the professionals, that maybe they are leaving because of the children's ministry, so you are asking about questions about the children's ministry—how can we improve? How can we improve this ministry or that ministry? And they are not the ones who are really may be the professionals to be able to give that advice.

That's exactly right. If somebody leaves and they say well, you just don't have the quality children's ministry around here that we need. I would not go to them and ask how they can make the children's ministry better. I would bring in a professional children's minister. Go find someone who is serving at a church, twice your size, and say—look, would you be willing to take a Sunday and come over and evaluate our children's area? And let the professionals give you advice. I mean, if I'm sitting in the back of a plane and the person says—you know, the pilot is just not flying this plane well. I don't interview that person and then take that list to Delta Airlines, and say—how can we make the pilots better? No, we go get professional pilots together to give this guy some pilot lessons. So professionals can give advice to professionals. The opinion of the people in your church, it should be heard and you should listen to that and all, but I would not make radical changes based on that. I know that some who are listening to this, you are die hard church systems fans. You've read all my stuff, and you know that I do ask for survey feedback from my first time guests and second time guests, and the truth is, if somebody says—hey the restroom smells and somebody five times tells me that, I do go in there and put an air freshener in the restroom. If somebody says—I got lost in the parking lot, I would go out and put more signs in the parking lot. So it's not that getting feedback is important, I'm just not willing to make major, major changes based on the opinion of somebody who is leaving the church. I would

rather base my changes on the those who want to stay in the church.

BONUS 2

Hey Nelson, you talked about under the reason of fit, sometimes they are just not a fit for your church, that you ought to examine your promotion. So I thought that it would be really good for us to unpack that and maybe some things that we could go back to our churches and really begin to examine what it is we are doing that may be giving off a wrong appearance.

The best fit, I mean that I started with that one. It's not the easiest one to teach. Hopefully, if you are listening to this bonus resource, you made it past that one, of course. You wouldn't even still be listening if you didn't find something helpful. That's a difficult one to start with because the truth is, your church is not going to be able to reach everybody. And I have this belief and I think it's a Biblical belief that your church is best equipped to reach a certain kind of person. And that generally is a certain type of age group, a certain type of a demographic, a certain type of sociological status, and I'm not talking about color of skin or anything like that, but just for example, every church that I lead in The Journey Church network is an English speaking church. So by default, if you speak Spanish and you show up at our church, and you have no comprehension of English, you aren't going to be a good fit for us. Now, it's not that you are a bad person. It's just that our church is probably not going to be able to help you. But now let's think about that. If I were to promote services in Spanish, and Spanish people show up and I don't offer services in Spanish, I've done a disservice. In some of our larger services, we do American Sign Language. And there is always that one week where the interpreter doesn't show up. And that's embarrassing because it is inevitably that's the week where we have the first time person who shows up who needs the ASL interpretation. I think to myself, I did that person a disservice. I told them we were going to ASL today, and ASL interpreter is not here. They understand that. I mean, the person can understand—hey, I don't know where they are. They are normally here for the 11 AM service, but they are not. So, if somebody shows up at your church because of a promotion that you did but then you are not the kind of church you promoted, I mean, you did a disservice to them. If you said rocking music, and your music is dead, you did a disservice to them. So don't trick people in your promotion, that if your church is primarily made up of 50 year olds in a retirement community, don't put a lot of young families walking on the beach with babies in your promotion. I used to see churches

do this with their logos. A church would have a logo that was a river. And there wasn't a river within 15 miles of that church. They would have pictures of people on the beach and they were in the mountains. It's just. . .in the old marketing parlance, it's called "message to market match". And so you want to make sure the message you are promoting in the community matches the market that you are trying to reach. And I think that is just really going to help you because we all have people who would show up at our church who were needy, and maybe they didn't see a promotion, but we can get them to a church that can help them. For example, I say, if you are homeless in the city, the best possible church you could go to is that church on the lower east side that I told you about. But if you show up at The Journey, we can get you to that church. If you are a first generation immigrant from Haiti, and you show up at our church, and you are a French speaking Haitian, the best place I can get you to is to the French speaking Haitian church across town. So I can get you to that church. I can direct you to that church, but we are not the church for you. So I shouldn't be promoting something that I can't live up to.

So some of the things the guys should do is maybe look at their bulletin shells, maybe a lot of them have these stock bulletin shells, and reexamine those, and reexamine what sites...

And be real practical. Look at your promotion that is going out, and say—is that attractive to my audience? For example, I worked with a church pretty closely that has a big ministry to the villages down in Florida. It's not a Journey network church, but it's one of my coaching alumni churches. Well, in the villages, it's a large retirement community. I don't know, 50,000 people maybe more. And so if he sent out promotion that was in really small print, that would probably be a bad message to market that. He should do larger than normal print because when you are dealing with 60 year old or 70 year old retirees, you don't point in five point font. You put it in 15 point font. Or something like that. Just to give an example. And then that guy is in Florida, so his promotion should be bright sunshine. It shouldn't be dark, urban colors. But now at our campuses in New York City, we should look like a city. I shouldn't show pictures of palm trees in New York. I should show pictures of buildings in New York and so it's a very humbling kind of thing. But once you get it, it really works well for you, look at who you are reaching, and then say, this is the age group, the type of person, the sociographic, the financial demographic that I am reaching. What in my marketing is going to appeal to that same group? And I've talked a lot about this in my book *Launch*, and in the *Launch* seminar about who you can reach and who you can't reach and then market accordingly. Because good marketing attracts who you want to reach, and

it repels who you don't want to reach. So for example, I try to say practical teaching and rocking music. So I try to repel the people who want a big choir and who want liturgical services, or people who come expecting verse by verse 15 minute sermons. Now, I'm not against all that, I think it's great that we have a church across the street that does that, but it just means that if I promoted that and they came to our church, I would have done a disservice to them. But you see, Scott, what I am really trying to say is that, if you are authentic to who God called you to be, you are going to be able to keep more people. So, figuring out who you are as a church, who you are as a leader, authentically, who you are and then represent that in the community, that is going to give you the best chance to keep as many people as possible.

BONUS 3

Hey, Nelson, you mentioned in the point on not a good fit that structure was sometimes a reason that people didn't fit into the church.

We all are structured differently. Many of you listening, I'm sure, have congregational structure, you vote on everything. Some of you are structured with elders, others are pastor led churches. Rick Warren has a very famous quote that says—you can structure a church for growth, or you can structure it for control, but not both. So structure really matters when it comes to the growth of the church, and there are certainly growth impeding structures out there. We have chosen to be a pastor led church, number one, because we are a relatively young church and the sense of things. We started in 2002. The founding pastor is still the leader of our church network. And so we are a pastor led church and there are people who come to our church from time to time that will not stay because we are not a congregationally led. Or we are not elder led. Now, we do have elders. They just operate a little differently. We do have a board of directors, but they operate differently than sometimes the way they perceive that. At the same time, I coach a lot of pastors who are in deacon led churches or are elder led churches, or congregational led churches. They can't keep people because their church structure doesn't allow for new people to come in as readily or something like that. So structure sometimes can be an interesting barrier. It's often one of those barriers for people who have a church background. So someone who was maybe burned by a pastor in the past, might want to be in a church structure that is very congregational. Someone that was stuck in a structure where the church moved really slow and it took forever to make decisions, they might like being in a fast paced pastor led

church. Someone who has financial hang-ups, they might like being in a church that has very strong board oversight with an audit every year. We have that, too, in our church. We have a board that oversees our money and an audit every year, but the thing on that is don't be afraid of your structure. Don't try to hide it. Don't beat people over the head with your structure, but I would just say simply—have like a brochure somewhere that says how First Baptist Church is structured. How The Journey is structured. How Stone Point Church is structured. How the church is structured. And just be really clear about the structure of the church. And also, Scott, I have had people come up to me with almost like a scowl over their face and say—your not one of those pastor led churches are you? And I hesitate for a minute like—man, maybe I should tell them about our elders. Maybe I should tell them about our board. I take my breath, and I say—well, you know, we have determined that for our church the best structure for us to have a pastor led church. So we are a pastor, staff led church. And they say—that's great! That's exactly what I was looking for. Well, you sure didn't sound like it when you asked me. Or they say—you know, I've never heard of that kind of church. Tell me about that. So I will give them the brochure and they can talk about it. And they may stay and they may not. They have to decide if that's a good fit for them, or not. But sometimes, just education about how you are structured can help people stay. Now, we educate people with a brochure at the table. It's also something that we give out at our newcomer's reception. We give out the structure brochure. We go over it briefly at our newcomer's reception, that's an assimilation tactic if you are familiar with my Assimilation Intensive Resource. And then we spend portion of membership class talking about how we are structured because people like structures. And in many ways they're not necessary interested in what the structure is, as much as you have one and that it is clear.

BONUS 4

Alright, Nelson, this one is going to be a little bit more of a tough one. I think the first few were a little bit of a softball for you. So. . .

I didn't feel like that structure one was too softball.

Well, here's one—what do you do when it's a staff member who leaves the church?

Let me introduce you to my next resource, When a Staff Member Leaves the Church and What to do About it. No, we do have a resource called the Staffing Workshop, and that actually was a resource that we did like this. In fact, the last time you and I, Scott, were

in the studio together was during that resource. And I know it's been out for a while and depending on when you are listening to this, it may have been out for a long time, but that is one of the questions I deal with in this staffing resource, and that is, a particular kind of person. And the truth is, almost all of those reasons that we have listed, in this resource, could be reasons that a staff person leaves. I mean, if you think about it, it could be a bad fit. That could be one. They could fall into sin. That could be a reason. There could be an interruption in their life. I have had staff people have to leave New York because they get pregnant and they just couldn't see raising a child in New York or maybe they went through a divorce. They could have a bad experience. They could isolate themselves and they could be bored. So I guess all those reasons could apply to a staff person. When a staff person leaves, it is a unique situation. The first thing you should do when a staff person leaves, get a letter of recommendation. . .or excuse me, a letter of resignation. That may have been a Freudian slip of the tongue. Get a letter of resignation from that staff person and then have them write a letter that you will then share with the appropriate parties in the church. So it's two letters, a letter of resignation that is just for you. It's a formality. And then a letter that explains why they are leaving to the people that they served with at the church. So if they worked in children's ministry, it would be a letter that you would get but that you share with all the people that volunteered in the children's area. Or if they were the worship pastor, it would be a letter you would get that you would share with everybody in the worship area, and possibly everybody in the church. And you have them write that letter to the people they served with so now you've got their reasons on paper. They are often more gracious in that letter that you are going to share with the church than they would be if you just allowed them to stand up in public and share. I do not allow someone to share their resignation publicly. I share it publicly. I control what is going on with that. So then I would take that letter and I would share that with the appropriate audience in the church. So if it was children, I would share it with children. I wouldn't see a reason to share that with the entire church unless it was some egregious kind of sin. Then if it is that, you do have to share it with the whole church. The best path here is honestly is the best policy. Now, this could be a longer discussion than what we have when there is a moral failure because that takes it to a whole other issue, if there is a moral failure, but you need to consult a church that has gone through it before. You might want to consult a longer resource that I have on staffing. I know that Willow Creek has some great stuff on what happens when there is a moral failure. I just don't want to get into that, because there is no way on just these short little quick hits that we are doing here, where we can deal with that.

But I think generally speaking, honesty is the best policy. Letting people know why someone is leaving and then getting in someone's own words and getting that letter of resignation can be key. But in the midst of all of that part of your role, especially as the senior pastor or the senior staff is to protect the church. Protect the church from this person and if there is any hint that they want to do damage to the church, you have got to protect that church. You have to move that person out. And I've had people resign because of some of these issues that we have looked at in this resource about Why People Leave, and they want to stay around for a month, or they want to stay around for two months. But you know, the truth is, they are too damaging. So I am not going to pay them for a month, or pay them for even two months, but they are gone, once they resign and move them out. So we talked about that in the staffing resource of avoid long goodbyes. I think that is important, too, when a staff person wants to leave.

BONUS 5

Alright, Nelson, here's another question for you: how do you know when someone leaves?

Well, usually they walk out of the church, per se, calling me names. And so that's a pretty good indicator that that person is not. . .if someone doesn't curse me and storm out of the church every week, I consider my sermon a failure. Now the truth is, people don't usually walk away loudly. They kind of sneak away. It's kind of like the old joke about—who said money talks? Money doesn't talk, it just sneaks away quietly. And the truth is, for most of these issues that we have looked out in here, particularly the non-malicious reasons, people do just walk away quietly and so one of the things you want to do is build check points in your church's systems to find out if people are no longer connected. Now, one of my best ones and perhaps the most controversial way is to find people are leaving is to look at giving. Jesus said that where your treasure, there your heart will be also. And long before people leave with their feet, they leave with their heart. So when somebody stops giving that's a sign that there is something going on in their life. And every person that I have had leave, I can go back and see that six weeks before that, or even six months before that, they stopped giving. So we do a quarterly giving report where I look at people who gave last quarter, who have not given anything this quarter. I'm not worried about the amount, I'm just worried about the fact that they have stopped. And we will check in with them just to see. It won't be a financial check in, per se. Once a year we do a financial check in, but that's a different

talk for a different resource sometime. But we will check in with them. And I have had this happen just the other day, a lady who has been with us for a long time. She's an executive for one of the local colleges in town. She had not given during the previous quarter. And so I actually took her to follow up with. I mean, we are a large church with a lot of staff, so I had a handful of people I followed up with, as did the other people, and I followed up with her and I found out that she had had some very serious medical issues and the bills were piling up and so she had stopped giving in order to focus on those medical issues. Now, I dealt with the giving issue and I explained to her, and she agreed that was probably not the wisest decision to make, not to give, but mainly I followed up with her about her health issues. And then it happened to be a health issue that was pretty private and she didn't want a lot of people to know, and even though she was connected and in a small group, they had really kept this quiet. But it was really a point of ministering with her to find out that she was there. I don't think she was in danger at church, but once someone stops giving that's kind of the slippery slope to not being there. Other ways that we check in is every year when we run a new small group semester, we pull a list of people who were in groups the semester before, but are not in groups now. We have a special follow up with those. We do an annual member evaluation where we check in with people. And then I mention on the resource we do first class mail to our data base at least once or twice a year to get people who have moved, and all of these give us little check points with people. But I tell you what I really try to do, I really try to keep an eye on the grapevine. When it comes to the prayer requests, I look at every Connection Card every week, when it comes to the prayer requests, and that's a lot of time, but I mean, my responsibility as the shepherd is to know the sheep. I don't necessarily follow up with all those prayer requests, but I look at them, I use my spiritual intuition when God whispers to me, or I feel a prompting to follow up with someone, I do that, or I assign it to another pastor, then we try to create systems in our small groups and in our ministry teams where if there are serious prayer requests, that are going to lead to interruptions in people's lives, they are there. That gets sent up the line to our pastors. And I'll tell you Scott, I have found out about an interruption before and gone to someone and tried to squelch that. I will find out that somebody's praying that they get a job at the new company headquarters in Cleveland. And I will go to them and I will say—I want to challenge that prayer request. Being a part of our church and being here in this city, we put you in a missionary position and honestly do you really want to go to Cleveland, do you really want to go to Dallas, or wherever it might be, when you could be right here. And they say—well, New York is so touch or it's this or it's that, so sometimes I will challenge

those interruptions. Just like I challenged the guy who was divorced to draw back into close to church. I sometimes challenge people, and I do that prayerfully and I do that cautiously, but part of being a Christian is taking the difficult road sometimes. And so if you know that an interruption is coming, and you know that there is a difficult road. I tell you, a better example to this, this is unscripted guys, you start a new service and somebody doesn't want to get up that early. You know, you used to do services at 9:30, and then they don't want to come at 9:30. They have to be at work at 11:00. So they can't do the 11:00. So they have to come to the 9:00, I will challenge that. I will find out that somebody hasn't been coming. And you are saying to me that you have been a Christian for 10 years and Jesus gave His life on the cross, and you won't get up 30 minutes earlier? I say that sort of tongue in cheek, but the point is made as part of that. Or if you move locations and they don't want to travel an extra two miles or an extra 10 minutes, just challenge that thinking sometimes, and help people put that into perspective so that those interruptions don't happen.

