

LEADER CONVERSATION GUIDE

Reaching New People with Dave Ferguson, Chris Hodges, and More - Episode 235

An Unstuck Webinar Replay

In the [Q1 2022 edition of the Unstuck Church Report](#), our research found that church attendance has declined by an average of 30% in the last year. [Pew Research](#) also found that about 45 million less Americans identify as Christian today than they did a decade ago. All in all, the data confirms that churches are facing significant challenges in accomplishing their mission.

To help give practical advice and encouragement to church leaders ready to reach outward and engage their community, we invited Dave Ferguson (Community Christian Church), Chris Hodges (Church of the Highlands), and Jerry Sen (OneChurch.to) for a conversation around three strategies for reaching new people. Here's what they had to say:

Reaching New People: Relational Evangelism

“The people in your church want to share the love of God with other people. They want people to find and follow Jesus, but I think they just don't want to do it the way it's been done in the past—where people ended up feeling like a project or something to be conquered.” — *Dave Ferguson*

The B.L.E.S.S. Method:

- **Begin with prayer.** Begin to pray for the people or places where God has put you.
- **Listen.** Right now many Christians are more known for our talking than we are listening, when listening could be the most loving thing you can do for someone.
- **Eat.** It's not something you have to add to your life. It's something that's already a part of your life, and you have 21 opportunities every week.
- **Serve.** If you begin with prayer, listen, and eat, they will tell you how to love them. And that's when you can really serve them.
- **Story.** Instead of proclamation being first, it actually ends up being last, because after developing this relationship, they're going to want to hear your story of how Jesus changed your life.

Implementing the B.L.E.S.S. method:

Take the next nine months to a year and implement this method with your staff and key leaders (the top 20%). Have this top 20% of your key influencers do two things: Do one practice every day. And then, in your small groups, start with who did you B.L.E.S.S. this week? After nine or 12 months, lead a five or six week teaching series on the method. The other 80% are going to hear it and recognize it, and those 20% will influence the whole. Then you just have to celebrate it over and over again—through social media, videos, and testimonies, because **what gets celebrated gets repeated**. If you do it in that order, you can actually **create a culture**, and that culture is gonna be your greatest asset.

Reaching New People: Digital Ministry

“Jesus told us to go: go outside of the church, go into the cities, go into the towns. And in today's world, that means our phones, computers, and digital media.” — *Jerry Sen*

Strategies and Encouragement for Digital Ministry:

“In this season, we're trying almost everything: we're taking different pieces of our ministry offerings, gatherings, outreach, and putting it online. We are leaning quite aggressively into paid media strategies. We know that we need to reach millions of people, and we have to go beyond just our church base, so we're also trying search strategies.

In terms of social media, it's great to produce content for your church, but if it's not going *beyond your church* and spreading it through a paid channel (whether that's Facebook, Instagram, or YouTube), then the content is not getting its full reach potential. And there are so many people out there who are hurting right now who could use this content. If this comes across their way in social media, it'll make them curious. They'll start to ask: What is this all about? That's why we're focused on building an entire strategy of building the content: Who is that content for, and how much are we going to invest to spread that content?” — *Jerry Sen*

“One piece of encouragement as a reminder is that a smartphone is probably the greatest discipleship tool of our lifetime, and maybe in history. We have all of our people and the people we want to reach carrying this thing around with them every waking moment. And so the question then, once you grapple with that opportunity, then try to simplify it and don't let that intimidate you. You know how to do church: you disciple people, you get them in small groups, you have worship gatherings, and you train leaders. So we know how to do church—just don't let it intimidate you and start with simple steps.” — *Dave Ferguson*

Reaching New People: Weekend Services

“People will approach me after a sermon and say, ‘Thank you. You’ve changed my life.’ And I always say, ‘No, I didn’t. I pointed you to the one who changed your life. That’s all I was: **I’m the tour guide. I’m not the destination.**’ So we are very intentional about that because I know that if they have one moment where they felt like God was actually there, and that God cared about them, and they felt like God was listening to them and they sensed his presence, then that changes everything.” — *Chris Hodges*

It’s true that Sunday morning is for believers—to be encouraged and to take their next step toward Christ. But we also have to think about Sunday mornings from the perspective of somebody who is still spiritually curious and doesn’t have a relationship with Jesus yet. So how do you begin to plan that experience? How do you plan your teaching with that person in mind?

“We intentionally train every person that’s involved as a volunteer so that at every level, from the parking lot, to worship, to whatever I speak on, it’s an experience that draws them to the Lord. It takes great training of your volunteers to prepare people’s hearts to feel like ‘this is a place that feels safe, it’s a place that I can trust and it’s a place that cares about me.’

I also think that the church has to get out of the way at some point. There’s a lot of people that are building their brands and building their preaching styles and people love *them*. But as C.S. Lewis said, ‘The perfect worship service is the one that we were unaware of because God’s presence was there.’ So we’re careful when planning services because we don’t want any barriers. We want enough to draw them in, but we don’t want too much where they’re distracted by it.”

— *Chris Hodges*

Final Encouragement for Reaching New People

“There’s endless opportunity in this season to reach people for Christ. It’s sitting right in front of us. We have the best message to share, hands down, in the entire world, and there’s millions of people waiting to hear it. So I encourage pastors to try things, take risks, and if it fails, that’s okay—you’ll learn from it and you’ll move past it. And then you’ll get onto the next thing that does work.” — *Jerry Sen*

“At the end of the day, the right way is the way that works. I’m for all the methods. **I’m yes to digital. I’m yes to relational. I’m yes to in-person.** Don’t think one is the solution—let’s do the best we can at every single one of them.” — *Chris Hodges*

Discover the Unstuck Process

For more than a decade, we've helped **500+ churches of all sizes** clarify their vision (where they believe God's called them to go) and their strategies (how they are going to get there). In everything that we do, our priority is to help churches help people **meet and follow Jesus**.

[Learn more](#) about how The Unstuck Group can serve your leadership and your ministry, or [start a conversation](#) today.

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