

Lost in America

Objective: To take a candid look at what unchurched people think about the church today and to consider where our friends and acquaintances are in their faith journey.

Discovery Activity

“Share about a time when you got lost during your growing up years.”

Question #1: What kinds of emotions did the experience of being lost generate inside of you?

Question #2: How does it feel to be lost without God in your life? If you’ve been a Christian since childhood, how do you think it would feel?

Unchurched Harry and Mary

There are lost, unchurched people all around us. If they continue without Christ until the end of their life on earth, they will spend eternity without Him (John 3:36, John 5:29).

Where should we start? How do we begin? A great starting place is a careful study of the world of the unchurched. To impact unchurched “Harry and Mary” we must understand how they think, feel and behave. In his book, *The Unchurched Next Door*, Thom Rainer discovered some very interesting things about people who do not have a church home. Here are ten surprises that Rainer and his team of researchers uncovered:

- Surprise #1:** Most of the unchurched prefer to attend church on Sunday morning if they attend.
- Surprise #2:** Females are likely to be either the most antagonistic or the most receptive to the Gospel.
- Surprise #3:** Most of the unchurched feel guilty about not attending church.
- Surprise #4:** 82 percent of the unchurched are at least “somewhat likely” to attend church if they are invited.
- Surprise #5:** Very few of the unchurched have had someone share with them how to become a Christian, and Christians have not been particularly influential in their lives.
- Surprise #6:** Most of the unchurched have a positive view about pastors, ministers and the church.
- Surprise #7:** Some types of “cold call” evangelism are effective, but many are not.
- Surprise #8:** The unchurched would like to develop a real and sincere relationship with a Christian.
- Surprise #9:** The attitudes of the unchurched are not correlated to where they live, their ethnic or racial background, or their gender.
- Surprise #10:** Many of the unchurched are far more concerned about the spiritual well-being of their children than of themselves.

Faith Stages

In addition to the surprising insights from their research, Rainer and his team also discovered that there were five distinct groupings of un-churched people in our culture today. Briefly, they are:

Group 5: The most resistant, even antagonistic to the church and to the Gospel. They are intensely skeptical of the Bible and the claims of Christianity. Many have had a wounding church experience from earlier in their lives. Their motto would be “Religion is okay for the weak-minded.”

Group 4: Resistant to the Gospel but do not have an antagonistic attitude. Many have a belief in the afterlife which may or may not include heaven and hell. Christ is viewed as having an important role in history. They have used prayer as a safety net but don’t know if anyone is really listening. Resistant to someone trying to convert them. Their motto would be “Just what is truth?”

Group 3: No apparent interest in the church but open to discussions. Believes in a heaven and hell. They have a positive view of Jesus and of most Christians but what they believe about God is quite puzzling. Their motto would be “Church just isn’t my thing.”

Group 2: They may say all the right “spiritual” things but they have yet to make a personal step of faith. Often believe that one needs to work his or her way into heaven. Probably open to studying the Bible and to discussing its claims. Would be open to an invitation to visit a church. Their motto would be “Jesus is just alright with me.”

Group 1: Highly receptive to hearing about the Gospel and engaging in spiritual conversations. Probably have been involved in a church at some point in their life. Feel bad about making excuses for not going to church more. Pray on a regular basis. Like Group 2’s, they believe that one works their way to heaven. Their motto would be “What must I do to be saved?”

Practice Activity

It's everyone's opportunity to play Unchurched Harry or Mary. One person will role play one of the five unchurched profiles while the other person plays the role of a Christian trying to strike up a conversation. The person who is role playing is not to reveal which profile they are acting out. See if the "Christian" can guess who their person is at the end of the interview!

Sample role playing questions:

1. Tell me a little bit about your religious background.
2. How would you describe your attitude toward the church?
3. What is your view of the typical Christian?
4. How do you believe someone will get to Heaven?
5. What do you think about Jesus Christ?
6. What is your biggest turn-off with Christians and churches?

Question #1: How did it feel to play an unchurched person?

Question #2: What dynamics did you observe in the role play?

Question #3: What can we learn from this experience?

Homework Assignment

Here is a homework assignment that will help you to apply what we've discovered today. In the next week, (or before the next session) take a few minutes to talk to a friend that doesn't currently attend church very often. Simply explain that you are taking a class at your church and that you have the assignment to talk to someone about church and Christianity. Use the role-playing questions to guide your conversation.

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