

Anchored to the Rock—Geared to the Times
by Michelle Connor

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The catchy phrase that titles this article came from a recent evangelism conference, and was used by Youth for Christ when Billy Graham was working with them. It's a reminder that in evangelism, the content of the Gospel will never change. Yet our methods will change as the culture changes.

This challenge to connect an unchanging message with an ever-changing culture is daunting. Making it personal, how do I reach my non-believing friends and relatives, people who are immersed in today's culture? The conference helped me clarify some basics.

We first need to recognize what is actually going on around us in today's culture. It's painfully obvious we've moved to a post-Christian era in which the church is no longer a key player in the culture and, in fact, is mostly ignored and often mocked. This reality makes it even more important that we remain faithful to God and find new methods of reaching the lost with the Gospel!

To reach the lost, we must meet them on their terms. Think of it as fishing. When you go fishing you do not wait for the fish to come to you. No! You go where the fish are. Better yet, think of how Jesus did it in his ministry. He was always meeting people where they were, hanging out with tax-collectors and prostitutes. He did not make them come to him at the synagogue.

To meet people on their terms, we need to know what non-believing people need. One need is dialogue. They do not want to be preached at. They desire a safe place where they can be heard and respected and can ask questions of faith that matter to them. They want us to be authentic and our actions to match what we say. As Christians, we often do not realize that many non-believers do not have a problem with the real Jesus when they get to know Him. Most of their problems have to do with the church and us.

One of the greatest needs of non-believers is community. How great would it be if the church could be their answer for community! Perhaps it would be more likely to happen if we welcomed them in and let them belong, in some sense, before they believed, if we had small groups made up of mostly non-believers, if we provided a place where they could dialogue about their questions of faith.

As both prayer and challenge, if you have a heart for the lost, may you ignite that same passion in your local church and work strategically to reach the people that God also loves! "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost." Luke 19:10

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Reflection Questions

1. Where does your church meet non-believers?
2. What entry points exist for non-believers in your church?
3. How does your church intentionally connect to non-believers who worship with you or are touched by one or more of your ministries? Who effective has your church been in connecting? Hint: If they aren't sticking around what you're doing isn't effective.
4. Can people belong to your church before they believe? If so, in what ministries do they connect before believing? If not, what ministries might you initiate or retool to help people connect?
5. What steps does your church take to move people from belonging to believing?
6. What is one thing you will do to help your church be a welcoming place where non-believers can belong so that they may come to believe?