

15 Characteristics of Today's Unchurched Person

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If you're like many Christians, you have an authentic desire to share your faith with people who don't yet follow Jesus. I know I do.

One of my deepest longings is that every person would come to know the love and salvation that Jesus extends to them.

Our vision at [Connexus](#), where I serve as lead pastor, is to be a church that unchurched people love to attend – a vision we share with all [North Point strategic partner churches](#).

But unchurched people are changing.

Even since I started ministry 18 years ago, there's been a big shift in how unchurched people think. We are a bit of a hybrid between the US and Europe, particularly here in Canada. Canadians are less 'religious' than Americans but less secular than Europeans.

Gabe Lyons and David Kinnaman have outlined helpful characteristics of unchurched people in [UnChristian](#) and David tackled it again in [You Lost Me](#). I won't repeat those characteristics here. (Both books are fantastic reads.)

Post-modernism has a deeper toe-hold here than in almost anywhere in America except perhaps the Northwest and New England, where it might be about the same.

Here are characteristics of unchurched people that I'm seeing today.

1. They don't all have big 'problems.' If you're waiting for unchurched people to show up because their life is falling apart, you might wait a long time. Sure, there are always people in crisis who seek God out. But many are quite content with their lives without God.

And some are quite happy and successful. If you only know how to speak into discontent and crisis, you will miss most of your neighbors.

2. They feel less guilty than you think. They don't feel any more guilty about not being in church on Sunday than you feel guilty about not being in synagogue on Saturdays. How many Saturdays do you feel bad about missing synagogue? That's how many Sundays they feel bad about missing church.

3. Occasional is regular. When they start coming, they don't always attend every week. Giving them easy, obvious and strategic steps to get connected is important. Disconnected people generally don't stick. (I wrote more about the [declining frequency of church attendance](#) here.)

4. Most are spiritual. Most unchurched people believe in some kind of God. They're surprised and offended if you think of them as atheists. As they should be.

5. They are not sure what "Christian" means. So you need to make that clear. You really can't make any assumptions about what people understand about the Christian faith. Moving forward, clarity is paramount.

6. You can't call them back to something they never knew. Old school 'revival' meant there was something to revive. Now that we are on the 2nd to 5th generation of unchurched people, revival is less helpful to say the least. You can't call them back to something they never knew.

7. Many have tried church, even a little, but left. We have a good chunk of people who have never ever been to church (60% of our growth is from people who self-identify as not regularly attending church), but a surprising number of people have tried church at some

point – as a kid or young adult. Because it wasn't a good experience, they left. Remember that.

8. Something is generous. Because even giving 10% of your income to anything is radically countercultural, the only paradigm of giving they have is a few dozen or hundred dollars to select charities. I hope every Christian learns to live a life of sacrifice and generosity but telling them they are ungenerous is a poor way to start the conversation. They are probably already more generous than their friends.

9. They want you to be Christian. They want you to follow Jesus, authentically. Think about it, if you were going to convert to Buddhism, you would want to be an authentic Buddhist, not some watered-down version. [Andy Stanley is 100% right](#) when he says you don't alter the content of your services for unchurched people, but you should change the experience.

10. They're intelligent, so speak to that. Don't speak down to them. Just make it easy to get on the same page as people who have attended church for years by saying "this passage is near the middle of the bible." You can be inclusive without being condescending.

11. They hate hypocrisy. Enough said.

12. They love transparency. When you share your weaknesses, everyone (including Christians) resonates.

13. They invite their friends if they like what they're discovering. They will be your best inviters if they love what you're doing.

14. Their spiritual growth trajectory varies dramatically. One size does not fit all. You need a flexible on-ramp that allows people to

hang in the shadows for a while as they make up their mind and one that allows multiple jumping in points throughout the year.

15. Some want to be anonymous and some don't. So make your church friendly to both. Also, see the previous point. This is huge.