Over half of the American people (55%) are unhappy with their jobs. After 40 hours of unhappiness each week why would they want to go to a church on the weekend and be unhappy there too? The reality is most Americans do not attend church at all, including Christians. Currently 78% of Americans claim to be Christian, but only 20% ever attend church.

Even more disturbing is the absence of younger generations in much greater numbers. In his book, Surprising Insights from the Unchurched, Thom Rainer revealed, “Each new generation (younger) becomes increasingly unchurched.” The most often cited reason for a decline in church attendance is irrelevance. Simply put, they don’t enjoy it. Currently, only about 29% of people in their twenties are interested in attending church, compared with 41% of people in their 50’s and 60’s.
In our society today if church is not enjoyable, or “fun”, people, even the members of the church, will not attend. We use the word “fun” very generically these days, but in Ellen White’s time 100 years ago the word “fun” was not a good word. It meant superficial, jovial, or even irreverent. Today however, the word “fun” means enjoyable. “I had fun at work today,” or, “My class was so much fun today.” Perhaps you can say your church service is fun, or enjoyable, but most people wouldn’t say that. This is why Ellen White wrote, “Make the worship service both interesting and attractive. Our meetings should be made intensely interesting.”

The word “interesting” refers to intellectual stimulation, and “attractive” means appealing to the senses. Church services should feed the mind of the worshippers, and engage as many of the senses as possible. Every teacher knows learning and recall increase when more of the senses are engaged.

Here are seven principles that have consistently turned otherwise irrelevant and unappealing churches into “intensely interesting” places where people connect with Jesus Christ in a life transforming way. I call them the magnificent seven.

**Principle #1:** The pastor preaches interesting and relevant, biblical sermons.

The Billy Graham School of Missions, Evangelism and Church Growth conducted a six-year study, in which they contacted over 2,000 churches from numerous denominations in a wide variety of geographical regions. They eventually contacted 353 formerly unchurched persons for in depth interviews who had become actively involved in church attendance. The findings of this amazing research were published in the book, *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched*. Thirteen factors were identified as significant in leading the unchurched to become active in church attendance. Of those thirteen, the one factor identified by over 90% of those surveyed was preaching that teaches the Bible. “Now we are hearing from the formerly unchurched that preaching that truly teaches the Bible in its original context is a major factor in reaching the unchurched . . . Pastors who understand this and who communicate doctrine clearly are among the leaders whose churches are reaching the unchurched.”

The apostle Paul understood this
principle. He tailored his messages to the interests of the people he encountered (Acts 17:22-23). That made his messages relevant.

In Des Moines, Iowa there is a Lutheran church with thousands of people in attendance each Sunday. When I asked a member of that church what accounted for such growth he said, “Its our pastor. He preaches the most interesting and relevant sermons right from the Bible.”

In her book, *Losing Our Religion*, author S.E. Cupp, a self-avowed atheist wrote her book to expose, as she said, “the mainstream media’s overt hostility toward Christian America.”\(^8\) Cupp believes the Christian faith is under attack in America and she believes that threatens our American way of life. “Targeting faith is targeting Democracy, and that’s something that should make every American deeply concerned for the future.”\(^9\) The prophecies of Daniel and Revelation tell us where all of this religious/cultural turmoil is leading. We have the light of the Bible, the truth, that America and the world is looking for. Pastors have the most interesting and compelling messages to give to a planet groping in the darkness. Let us return to the Bible and preach it with all our heart.

**Principle #2:** The pastor is caring and authentic. The second factor that over 90% of the formerly unchurched identified, as a significant impact on their decision to return to church was their personal interaction with the pastor. They didn’t intend to say they had a friendship with the pastor, but that their interactions with the pastor left them feeling confident that the pastor was authentic and that he, or she, cared for them. Ellen White understood this critical relationship between the pastor and the members of the church. “The people will seldom rise higher than their pastor.”\(^10\) In more recent times, John Maxwell, well know pastor, author and motivational speaker is often heard to say, “Everything rises and falls on leadership.”

Just a couple of weeks ago I was standing in the fellowship dinner line of the church I pastor when I noticed a lady I had seen only a couple of times before. As I was selecting food for my plate I engaged her in some casual conversation. Later
that week I got a phone call from her friend, a member of my congregation, who had invited her to church. “Pastor,” she said, “thank you so much for talking with my friend at lunch last Sabbath. She told me no pastor had ever inquired about her well being in her whole life and it meant so much to her. She had decided our church is the place she wants to attend.” It was a brief conversation, but in the Holy Spirit it meant all the difference to that lady.

**Principle #3:** The members of the church are friendly and receptive. The unchurched identified the receptivity of church members as the third most significant factor in their decision to attend that particular church. “And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near,” Hebrews 10:25.11

Ellen White understood the powerful influence church members have on visitors. She wrote, “The Lord does not now work to bring many souls into the truth, because of the church members who have never been converted and those who were once converted but who have backslidden. What influence would these unconsecrated members have on new converts? Would they not make of no effect the God-given message which His people are to bear?”12

Clayton and Audrey Child of Spokane, Washington, are a perfect example of the power for good church members can have on the desirability and growth of a church. They are constantly seeking out visitors to get acquainted, and more often than not, they invite those visitors home for an enjoyable Sabbath lunch. Often they are seen attending the special occasions in the lives of those very same people including birthday celebrations, weddings, funerals, graduations, etc. Their friendliness and sincere concern are known immediately to anyone who meets them. The Childs have sincere hearts, genuine smiles, joyful greetings, and a willingness to show up and support others. You never hear them criticize others, but often their voices are lifted up in prayer for those in need.

**Principle #4:** The church services are interesting and attractive. Notice the quotation from Ellen White above says “make” the meetings intensely interesting
and attractive. It takes much thought, prayer, planning and preparation to make a worship service appealing. Few churches invest that kind of time in their programs. In many churches the liturgy, or the order of service, hasn’t changed in years.

Here are some practical suggestions that may help you make your church service more appealing. 1) Simplify your liturgy. Don’t try to crowd in too many things. People often get lost in the details. 2) Use art. PowerPoint slides, videos, skits, paintings, banners, natural greenery (even stuffed animals) and the like all add to the visual appeal of your sanctuary or worship hall. 3) If you can, incorporate music into your messages. A well-placed song will reinforce your message in a way nothing else can. Invite the congregation to sing with you. In doing so you have accomplished two things: more participation and auditory enrichment. 4) It is still true that illustrations are still the windows of the sermon allowing fresh air to fill the room of listeners. 5) Encourage participation. It wouldn’t be so bad if someone asked a question. In fact, some pastors field impromptu Bible questions from the congregation in place of a sermon. The effect is constant interest maintained. 6) A concert now and then is another powerful element to incorporate into your worship schedule. 7) Testimonies from members of the congregation whether planned or spontaneous will draw the attention of people in a very meaningful way.

**Principle #5:** Prayer is still the key in the hand of faith to unlock heaven’s storehouse where are kept blessings too amazing to describe. The apostle Paul urged Timothy, a young pastor to be faithful in prayer: “I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people. Ask God to help them; intercede on their behalf, and give thanks for them . . . This is good and pleases God our Savior, who wants everyone to be saved and to understand the truth,” 1 Timothy 2:1-4.

One Friday evening as I was considering the thoughts God had impressed on my heart to share the next morning in church I knelt to pray. Soon I was drawn into an intense period of prayer for the unchurched. This continued for some time, and finally I was released from the burden.
The next day, as I was greeting people at the door after the service, I noticed a young lady in her early 30’s sitting nervously in the back pew of the church waiting to visit with me. The young lady, Tracy, said she occasionally came to church to support her Christian husband. She admitted she normally didn’t listen to the sermon but brought reading material instead. However, on this particular Sabbath she was compelled to listen to the sermon and could think of nothing but how much she needed God. When the sermon was over she and her husband left immediately. When they were only a few blocks from the church Tracy insisted her husband turn around and take her back. “I just have to talk to the pastor,” she said.

As Tracy told me her story I could see she was very troubled and she was shaking. She said, “Look at me. What has happened to me? I’ve never felt like this before, and I don’t know what to do.” I shared the gospel story with Tracy emphasizing how much God loves her, and how Jesus died to take away her sins. When I finished I invited Tracy to accept Jesus as her Savior. She readily agreed and we prayed right then. As soon as she said “Amen,” a peace and joy settled over her entire being. From that day till now she has been a great blessing to our church. Prayer made the church service intensely interesting to Tracy that day.

**Principle #6:** Recreation brings us together in an enjoyable setting, which makes it much easier for us to become friends. Many years ago Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan, conducted a survey of thousands of former Seventh-day Adventists to find out why they left the church. Of those surveyed 95% said it was not doctrine that caused them to leave the church but the absence of meaningful relationships with other members. Another study revealed that by the time a person has been a member of a church for 20 years they no longer have any friends outside of the church. They have plenty of unchurched acquaintances, but no friends. Thus the question becomes, how do we help our church members become friends with unchurched people in the community? The answer is recreation.
If you were to take all of the social programs you normally enjoy in your church and hold them for the community instead you would find the interest of your church members and their unchurched friends increasing dramatically. In addition, spend enough money on these social events to make them very special, and then charge a small fee for those who attend. People don’t mind paying a small price to attend something of value. In this way you will not exhaust the funds of your church and you’ll be able to provide better quality programs. The members of your church will have interesting programs to invite their acquaintances to, and soon those acquaintances will become their friends.

**Principle #7:** Friendship will inevitably lead to spiritual conversations and decisions for Christ. As the pastors and members of churches mingle with the people of the community in an enjoyable setting they begin to trust one another and friendships are formed. Soon your friends will ask questions of you in regard to your faith in such a natural way that it will be easy for you to give them an answer because, after all, they are your friends. The next thing you know you are leading them in a very simple and powerful prayer to receive Jesus Christ as their Savior.

In John 15:15 Jesus said, “Now you are my friends.” Jesus looked upon His disciples as His friends. I believe this is what Jesus wants us to do today in the cities and villages of our day – make friends. As Jesus was leaving this world after the resurrection to take His place as our Advocate and Intercessor in heaven He said to His disciples, “Therefore, go and make disciples (friends) of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,” Matthew 28:19.

Relevant biblical sermons presented in an interesting manner by a caring and authentic pastor, together with a receptive church, in a beautiful setting, covered by prayer and supported by enjoyable activities with friends will definitely make any church intensely interesting and attractive.


5 Ibid, pg. 34

6 White, Ellen G. Pastoral Ministry. Silver Spring: General Conference Ministerial Assoc., 1995. pg. 176.


9 Ibid, pg. 3


11 All Bible references are from the New Living Translation of the Bible unless otherwise noted.