



# Getting Guests Back

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*Three ways to lose them,*

*Three ways to keep them,*

*and the one question they must answer for themselves*

—Timothy J Miller

Easter is coming!

You've been exhorting, imploring, and challenging your congregation to invite their friends, neighbors, relatives, and just about everyone they meet to attend your Easter service. Now the guests are on the way.

Your congregants will be on their best behavior. The church is looking nice. The service is planned in detail. The guest gift bags are filled and waiting at the Info Desk. Your sermon is spot on. You're ready!

Pastors who are hungry to bring in people desperately needing to connect with Jesus realize that getting guests to make their first visit is the easy part. But once you greet them and treat them, will they return?

That's the trick, isn't it.

In-touch pastors realize how tenuous a guest's "I'm coming back" decision really is. Do they feel welcome? Do they fit in? Do they sense that they can be significant? Most likely, you've already addressed these make-or-break considerations.

But simply providing a good service experience doesn't cut it anymore. Guests can find that online with all the bells and whistles or simply try another church down the street doing something differently. Perhaps the golf course or the boat may be calling their name. So much competes for attention.

If your guests don't return, your congregation's disappointment and loss of their investment of energy and relational clout results in becoming less willing to invite someone the next time.

Even if you've prepared a fantastic experience for your guests, you will lose them if they can't answer the real question:

*“Can I experience God here?”*

If your guest answers this with a “Yes,” they'll come back long enough to begin connecting. But miss this, and they'll never come back. Not ever.

Such a challenge! How do you compress 66 books of the Bible and 20 years walking with Jesus into a couple of minutes during which your guests experience the Lord—and accomplish all this before you even preach a single word from your sermon's introduction?

The answer is amazingly simple.

*Use a song.*

God gave us music as a doorway to engage Him. He built into us actual instruments—voices, hands, fingers, feet. Music impacts us on physical, intuitive, cognitive, and even relational levels. It can bypass cultural, linguistic, theological, and mental obstacles. It allows us to express our hearts and reach to Him. There's no surprise that every culture I've ever studied has cultivated some form of musical expression.

If you're the kind of pastor who is committed to church growth, you've probably read the research indicating one common thread in church models currently growing. That factor: congregations engaged in expressive worship.

Music provides the doorway through which your guests can engage.

But, as you know, music can also lose them. These three false beliefs hamper effective music in church.

## Three Fallacies That Killers Effective Church Music

### **Fallacy #1: A song is a warm up for the sermon.**

When I speak, I like having people already receptive for what I'm about to share. Music, stories of what God is doing in the lives of the congregation, and other elements can help foster a sense of expectation and a readiness to receive.

But I have to admit that sometimes the highlight of the service is found outside of my carefully crafted presentation. I can't count how many times after a service I've overheard someone humming one of our songs in the hallway or bathroom. Yes, that's a great sign that they've connected in some way, but it steps a bit on my pride to admit that I've heard this far more than discussions about the excellent points of a recent sermon.

Songs are memorable in and of themselves. They speak powerfully into people's lives. And while diligent pastors seek the Lord's guidance for the sermon and deliver it well, how much more powerful are moments when the Holy Spirit speaks directly to someone's heart during times of praise. I can't compete with that, and am certain that neither you nor I would want to.

### **Fallacy #2: A song should be listened to.**

It's no coincidence that each Hebrew word for "praise" translates as a physical action expressing an internal interaction with God. Praise is meant to be experienced through participation, not merely observed and given mental assent. But if your guests find within themselves a desire to engage—even if they are not quite sure how—that hunger will motivate them to return, especially when they realize what they felt was a desire to connect with God.

### **Fallacy #3: The quality of a song's presentation is not as important as its content.**

Content must be biblical. But it also must be presented with excellence and authenticity. Guests lack the relational connections that help the rest of the congregation extend grace to overlook mistakes and sloppiness. If you've ever sat through a "special music" presentation in which you find yourself hoping the person just makes it to the end of the song, realize that for guests it's an even more

uncomfortable experience. And when the congregation responds with smiles or applause at what was so obviously terrible, guests can easily assume that the disconnect between their own reaction and the group's indicates an inability to fit here.

Also, a guest's lack of familiarity with your typical order of service and what to do (stand, sit, sing...) can make it quite difficult for them to comfortably participate without embarrassment.

The countenance of the musicians, technicians, staff, and even the congregation needs to match the words being presented. Mismatches create an awkwardness that shouts "these people are either unauthentic or I simply don't get them." Why should guests return to experience that again?

Guests usually do not expect the level of professional music performance, latest flashing lights, and top gear that they may pay to see at a concert or a theme park. Even so, that's what they have become accustomed to and often unconsciously compare you with. Usually this false measuring stick is easily washed away by relational connections and simply getting used to your way of doing church, but until a guest has been around long enough to get to know the hearts of some of your congregation, poor quality will stand out.

If you say that you're offering a sacrifice of praise to the Almighty Creator of the Universe, don't you think it may create a disconnect if the microphone can't stop ringing, the guitar is out of tune, the wrong lyrics are on the screen, and the vocalists don't even know the words to the song they're singing? Excellence counts.

### Three Factors That Make Music Effective

#### **Factor #1: A song's presentation must be engaging.**

That means there can be no hurdles that to distract or hinder congregational participation. Unfamiliar songs must be simple enough to quickly pass from Learning Mode into Engaged Mode. People need encouragement to get through that curve. Smiles, eye contact, comments, engaging music, congregational involvement, something interesting, provoking lyrics... there must be enough of a

pay-off to retain interest for another 25 seconds. And then the next 25, and the next, until engagement occurs.

**Factor #2: A song's presentation must open the door and get out of the way so people can interact with the Holy Spirit.**

Ephesians 4:11-13 basically says that our job as leaders is to equip our people and let them grow by doing things themselves. It's so easy for congregants to "let the professionals do it" and slip away from being engaged.

**Factor #3: A song must convey authentic interaction between God and His people.**

Even if a guest doesn't understand the why or the how, they can sense that something significant and appealing is going on which they desperately need. And they can certainly sense when the congregation is faking it and just going through religious motions. Our culture is sick to death of empty religion, but it is desperately hungry for a true encounter with the Savior. Worship-Arts staff and volunteers who are growing and experiencing the spiritual transformation that accompanies sacrificial service will convey that Jesus is accessible and truly present.

So how do you develop the kind of thriving music program capable of facilitating interactive experiences that draw your guests to return?

### Four Key Ministry Values

I wanted to share with you four of the key values covered in my book *Born For Worship*. While these values apply to any ministry in the church, they are particularly significant for those who serve in worship-arts ministry.

These values helped me grow a disjointed, damaged group of 26 individuals into a team of 108 trained, equipped, and unified musicians and technicians. I believe you'll see how your church could be impacted if your worship-arts team established such principles.

1. Ministry, at its core, is about transformation. Developing Christ-like character aligns you with how Jesus wants to touch the world through you.
2. People are at peak impact when serving through their Jesus-instilled gifts. A church is at peak impact when its parts function in unity and strength. We're better together.
3. Being a living sacrifice is not only the doorway through which we connect our soul to Jesus, it's also how we authentically reach the world. We are worship reflectors. We direct worship beyond ourselves and toward Jesus.
4. Congregational worship at its core remains a spiritual encounter between the Lord and His people. As important as the art is, regardless of how intricately crafted or passionately presented, human effort cannot replace that Jesus moves amongst us.

Pastors who shepherd their flocks understand the need for continual communication to embed these values into the DNA of the congregation. That's why we cast vision, disciple, model, teach, and debrief. It's why we equip and train our leaders to encourage and support those who serve in our worship-arts programs.

When people serving in worship-arts ministry embrace these values, significant things begin to happen. It's really a cycle. By catching the vision, passion increases. Passion increases desire to serve sacrificially. Serving leads to transformational growth. Growth proves and reinforces vision. Vision increases passion. Passion increases... rinse and repeat.

As people full of Christ-like character serve passionately at their peak impact with preparation and unity to declare who God is and thank Him for all He does, it's downright contagious. We've gathered in Jesus' name according to His purposes. He shows up.

And your guests? They'll be back!

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Author and ministry coach Timothy J Miller thrives on equipping individuals and teams to serve. His new book [\*Born For Worship: The Best You Can Be In Worship-Arts Ministry\*](#) (Amazon & Kindle) helps apply key values learned through over 30 years in the worship/leadership trenches as a worship pastor and musician. [www.htworship.com](http://www.htworship.com)

Right now **Kindle Unlimited members** can read [\*Born For Worship for FREE!\*](#)