

Who is Spiritual Receptive?

*In light of last weekend's message about sharing the love of Jesus with people who are receptive, I thought this article by **Rick Warren** was a perfect addition. Enjoy!*

Pastor Scott

You're surrounded by dirt. To be more precise, you're surrounded by soil – all kinds of soil. In your community, you have people who are ready to respond to the Gospel and people who aren't. Your job is to isolate the good soil and plant your seed there.

Jesus clearly taught this notion of spiritual receptivity in the Parable of the Sower and the Soils (Matt. 13:3-23). Like different kinds of soil, people respond differently to the Good News. Everyone is not equally ready to receive Christ. Some people are very open to hearing the Gospel and others are very closed. In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus explained that there are hard hearts, shallow hearts, distracted hearts, and receptive hearts.

If you want your ministry to maximize its evangelism effectiveness, you need to focus your energy on the right soil. That's the soil that will produce a hundred-fold harvest. Take a cue from those who work with actual dirt. No farmer in his right mind would waste seed, a precious commodity, on infertile ground that won't produce a crop. In the same way, I believe careless, unplanned broadcasting of the Gospel is poor stewardship. The message of Christ is too important to waste time, money, and energy on non-productive methods and soil. We need to be strategic in reaching the world. We should focus our efforts where they will make the greatest difference.

Spiritual receptivity comes and goes in people's lives like an ocean tide. People are more open to spiritual truth at certain times than at others. Many factors determine spiritual receptivity. God uses a variety of tools to soften hearts and prepare people to be saved.

So who are the most receptive people? I believe there are two broad categories: people in transition and people under tension. That's because God uses both change and pain to get people's attention and make them receptive to the Gospel.

People in transition: Any time people experience major change, whether positive or negative, they develop a hunger for spiritual stability. This has occurred in America during the last several years. The massive changes in our world have left us frightened and unsettled and has produced an enormous interest in spiritual matters. Alvin Toffler says that people look for "islands of stability" when change becomes overwhelming. This is a wave the Church needs to ride.

People are also more receptive to the Gospel when they face changes like a new marriage, a new baby, a new home, a new job, or a new school. That's why churches can generally grow faster in newer communities where new residents are continually moving in than in stable, older communities where people have lived for 40 years.

People under tension: God uses all kinds of emotional pain to get people's attention: the pain of divorce, death of a loved one, unemployment, financial problems, marriage and family difficulties, loneliness, resentment, guilt, and other stresses. When people are fearful or anxious, they often look for something greater than themselves to ease the pain and fill the void they feel. I claim no immaculate perception on the list I want to share with you. This is not a scientific study. But based on my many years of pastoring, I offer the following list of what I believe have been the 10 most receptive groups of people that we've reached out to at Saddleback:

- Second-time visitors to your church (unbelievers who come, regardless of the reason)
- Close friends and relatives of new converts
- People going through a divorce
- Those who feel their need for a recovery program (any type: alcohol, drugs, sexual, etc.)
- First-time parents
- Terminal illness of self or family member
- Couples with major marriage problems
- Parents with problem children
- Recently unemployed/major financial problem
- New residents in the community

A great benefit of focusing on receptive people is that you don't have to pressure them to receive Christ. I tell my staff: "If the fruit is ripe, you don't have to yank it!"

I believe God has called pastors to catch fish and feed sheep – not corral goats! It usually takes about five times more energy to reactivate a disgruntled or carnal member than it does to win a receptive unbeliever. The truth is that some of your inactive members probably need to join somewhere else for a number of reasons. Growing churches focus on reaching receptive people. Non-growing churches focus on re-enlisting inactive people.

Once you know who your target is, who you are most likely to reach, and who are the most receptive people in your target group, then you're ready to establish an evangelism strategy for your church. So my suggestion to you is this: start checking the soil.