

We Must Learn To Think Like Unbelievers

by Rick Warren

The longer you're a believer, the less you think like an unbeliever. After you come to Christ, your interests and values change.

Because I've been a Christian for most of my life, I think like a Christian. I don't normally think like an unbeliever. Worse than that, I tend to think like a pastor and that's even farther removed from an unbeliever's mind-set! That means I must intentionally change mental gears when seeking to relate to non-Christians.

If you look at most church advertising, it's obvious that it was written from a believer's viewpoint -- not from the mind-set of the unchurched. When you see a church ad that announces, "Preaching the inerrant Word of God!" who do you think that ad appeals to? Certainly not to unbelievers! Personally, I consider the inerrancy of Scripture as a non-negotiable belief but the unchurched don't even understand the term. If you're going to advertise your church you must learn to think and speak like unbelievers. The spiritual terminology that Christians are familiar with is just gibberish to the unchurched.

I've often heard pastors complain that unbelievers are more resistant to the Gospel today than in the past. I don't think that is true at all. More often than not, resistance is just poor communication.

The problem is that message isn't getting through. Churches need to stop saying that people are closed to the Gospel and start finding out how to communicate on their wavelength.

No matter how life-changing our message is if we're broadcasting

on a different channel from the unchurched it won't do any good.,

How do you learn to think like unbelievers? Talk to them! One of the greatest barriers to evangelism is that most believers spend all their time with other Christians. They don't have any non-believing friends. If you don't spend anytime with unbelievers, you won't understand what they're thinking. I began Saddleback Church by going door-to-door for twelve weeks and surveying the unchurched in my area. I wrote down in my notebook five questions I would use to start Saddleback:

1. **What do you think is the greatest need in this area?**
This question simply got people talking to me.
2. **Are you actively attending any church?** If they said yes, I thanked them and moved on to the next home. I didn't bother asking the other three questions because I didn't want to color the survey with the opinions of believers. Notice that I didn't ask, "Are you a member?" Many people who haven't been inside a church for twenty years still claim membership in some church.
3. **Why do you think most people don't attend church?**
This seemed to be a less threatening and offensive wording than "Why don't YOU attend church?" Today many people would answer that question with "It's none of your business why I don't go!" but when I asked why they thought other people didn't attend they usually gave me their personal reasons anyway.
4. **If you were to look for a church to attend, what kind of things would you look for?** This single question taught me more about "thinking like a unbeliever" than my entire seminary training. I discovered that most churches are offering programs that the unchurched are uninterested in.
5. **What could I do for you?** What advice can you give to a minister that really wants to be helpful to people? This is the most basic question the church must ask its

community. Study the Gospels and notice how many times Jesus asked someone “What do you want me to do for you?” He’d begin with a person’s needs.

This survey has been reprinted in dozens of books and articles. Several thousand churches have now used these 5 questions in their own communities. One denomination that I consulted with used these questions to start 102 new churches on a single day! If you haven’t ever surveyed the unchurched in your area I strongly recommend that you do.