

## The Social Dimension—Improving Relationships Within the Church And with Unbelievers

Few things are more essential to church revitalisation than a spirit of joy and unity within the church family. Similarly, healthy relationships with people *outside* the walls of the church are also vital if a church is going to reach the community. Good relationships do not just happen though. They must be intentionally cultivated, but how do we do that? This session will present practical suggestions on how to cultivate grace-filled relationships both inside and outside the church.

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### Getting Started – Let’s Talk

Let’s start with a moment of honesty: Have you ever gotten tired of people? Let’s listen to a brief blog post written by an overwhelmed pastor...

Tell me what you heard from that pastor’s heart, and what would you suggest for him?

### Getting to the Heart of the Matter

1. **Be Proactive.** Relationships within the church and with unbelievers are always a heart issue.
  - a. In your preaching and teaching, call God’s people to love LOST people. This is a major theme in the life of Jesus. (“If you don’t love lost people, you aren’t very much like Jesus”) **Matthew 9:36; Luke 15:1-32; 19:1-10**
  - b. In your preaching and teaching, call God’s people to biblical diversity, meaning that where *the Bible* gives room for multiple opinions, you give room too. Sometimes this is the “sticking point.” Make this a regular emphasis and be very specific with examples that fit your local & national culture. **Romans 14:1-23; I Corinthians 8-9**
2. **Protect unity** in the church family. Address differences. Resolve offenses. Don’t let the church be “hijacked” by an influential family, a single ministry, or a special interest group. Don’t commit the sin described in **James 2:1-7**.
3. **Emphasize and practice both GRACE and TRUTH.** Make this your church “DNA.” Pay close attention to your church culture. Remember **John 1:14 & 17**  
(Hand Out & Discuss a Sample “Church DNA” brochure)

## Practical Suggestions

1. **Stay close to Jesus' example.** For me as a pastor, that means that every 3-4 years I preach through one of the gospels. Jesus loved lost people and He loved His followers! Focus on His heart for both. Listen in on His conversations with lost people.
2. **Leaders, set an example.** Do you love both God's people *and* lost people? What practical ways do you show that love? Where do you have space in your calendar for casual time with people? One way I do this is to be part of our local Rotary Club.
3. **Watch Your Language.** How do you talk about “unbelievers” in the church? Are your church activities, sermons, and printed materials filled with “insider language” that makes outsiders *feel* like outsiders? This applies to church habits, clothing, and wall decorations. It takes very little effort to choose different words or to offer a clear explanation of what you're doing or saying. (Book: “Beyond the First Visit,” by Gary McIntosh; Get it; Read it!).
4. **Have fun with God's people.** Make sure your church calendar has social events that are just for fun and relationships – things like picnics, church dinners, parties that are actually fun.
5. **Find places to serve & interact with your neighbors & community with nothing expected in return, in the spirit of Jeremiah 29.** If your church moved out of your community, would they notice and would they miss you? Do your church people do things *with* their neighbors? What do you see in the picture below?



## Small Groups: Let's Talk

What ways could your church show love to your community, expecting nothing in return?  
What are some *needs* in your community or in your schools? Are there any community events or celebrations where you could *serve*? (Doing so will impact your community AND your church)

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What community or national celebrations should you encourage your church family to use for the gospel? (Things like the World Cup or Independence Day or another holiday) Remember, you don't have to like football to invite the neighbors over to watch the World Cup! You just need to love people.

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## Wrap Up

Remember the worn-out pastor we heard from a while ago? Let me finish his story...

## Suggested Reading

- *Re-Connect Your Church: A Practical Handbook for Church Revitalisation* by Dave Brown
- *One Size Doesn't Fit All: Bringing Out the Best in Any Size Church* by Gary McIntosh
- *The U-Turn Church: New Direction for Health & Growth* by Kevin Harney & Bob Bower
- *Re:Vision: The Key to Transforming Your Church* by Aubrey Malphurs & Gordon Penfold
- *Turn-Around Churches: How to Overcome Barriers to Growth* by George Barna
- *A Church Called Tov: Forming A Goodness Culture* by Scot McKnight & Laura Barringer
- *Leading Turnaround Churches* by Gene Wood
- *Beyond the First Visit: The Complete Guide to Connecting Guests to Your Church* by Gary McIntosh