

How to Invite a Friend to Church

In a world that seems to be so disinterested in religion, and in a country where church attendance has been in decline for so many years now, why invite people to church? There seems to be a well noted list of things you just don't bring up in conversation with people, and religion is on almost everyones list. In light of all of this, is inviting a friend to church even appropriate?

The answer is...it depends on what you are inviting them to. If you are inviting them to join a religion, or pay homage to an institution, or change their beliefs/values/behaviour, you may well be setting out on a journey to alienate yourself from others. If on the other hand you are inviting them to experience a community of people they will relate to appreciate, you are setting out on a journey that will have your friends and their families thanking you for the difference your invite made in their lives.

The apostle Paul said it this way: "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us." (2 Corinthians 5:20). Jesus said "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven"

With this as a background, here are some helpful tips on how to invite a friend to church.

5 Things to Keep in Mind Before You Invite a Friend

1) Check your motivation for inviting them to church with you

If your primary motivation in inviting a friend to church is anything but a genuine interest in them as a person and their life, it will likely come through in the way you ask. Don't ask out of duty, or because you want your church to grow, or because of a personal insecurity that needs to be validated. Ask because you sincerely believe they will love their experience and find it beneficial to their everyday life.

2) Have confidence that God has already been at work in their life. By the time a person expresses openness to attending church, they have likely had some other touch points with believers, and a few experiences that have made them think about trying out a church. They may even be waiting for you to invite them!

3) Don't be afraid of not having answers to all their questions. Think of it this way...when you recommend a product or service that you experienced that was really helpful, you likely share your experience and recommend it to others even if you don't have all the answers.

4) Expect pushback. Many people have had bad church experiences, and are likely to think all churches are the same. Even people with zero church experience may have stereotypes about what church is...many of which are false. Don't take their pushback personally and don't allow it to stir up your emotions. Remember, if you are expecting some pushback up front when you ask, it won't bother you at all, nor will it demotivate you from staying engaged in the conversation.

5) Have compassion for the fears they likely have about going to church. "Will I relate to anyone there? Will I be judged? Will they judge others whom I love? What if they discover I don't believe everything they do? What if I don't know when to sit, stand and chant after the minister says stuff I don't understand? What if they try to brainwash me? What if I wear the wrong clothes? What if they ask for my money? What if my kids misbehave because they are bored? What if they make me speak in front of the church? What if I'm centred out because I'm new? What if the service is boring and goes on for hours? We need to understand and appreciate the fears people have about attending church for the first time, and address the fears they have.

10 Practical Steps on Inviting a Friend

1) Pray for your relationship with your friend to grow

Pray that God will help you build a fun and meaningful relationship with them whether they ever attend church with you or not. If your only conversation item with them is your desire for them to come to church with you, the chances of them changing their mind at a later time are slim.

2) Pray for your friend to be receptive to your invite

While you spend energy worrying about what they will think of you when you invite them to church, God could already have been working in their hearts and minds to be receptive to your invite. Pray that God will make them receptive to your invite.

3) Invite them to church as naturally as you would invite them to anything else

The simplest ask would be something like “Hey Steve I’ve told you about how this church has been impacting me in my life. Why don’t you come this Sunday with me and I’ll buy you lunch after?”

4) Invite them with a sincere heart.

Here’s an example: “Sara, you know how I told you I have been kind of depressed since my Dad died? Well this church has really helped me get through some of my feelings about him. We are doing a message series and I think you would like it. It would mean a lot to me if you came this Sunday.”

5) Explain why you think they will benefit from attending.

Answer the “What’s in it for me” question that everyone asks consciously or subconsciously. Doing so is significantly easier and more natural when you already have a relationship with someone (otherwise, you may come across as nosy and judgmental) . Perhaps you might say “The message series we are in right now made me think of what you were just telling me the other day. I think you’d really benefit from this message series.” Or perhaps you might say “Our pastor is funny and the messages are very practical and insightful. It might give you some ideas on how to have a better relationship with _____”. You might also say “Parenting is one of the toughest things in the world. Wouldn’t it be nice to have a community of other parents who understand you who can encourage you, and other voices in your kids lives reinforcing the values you’re trying to teach at home?”.

6) Address their fears and concerns

Make sure they know that our church is designed with them in mind. Let them know that Starting Point is accepting, fun, practical, and inspiring. They don’t have to believe everything the church believes, in fact, our pastor encourages people to think for themselves. It’s not judgmental, political, or preachy. It’s only an hour, there’s no dress code, your kids will love it, you won’t be asked to speak in front of anyone, and you don’t have to give any money.

7) Listen to their pushback and objections with compassion

Many people have been influenced to have a negative view of religion. Many people have negative stereotypes about what church is, and some have had very hurtful experiences with church from their past. Show a genuine compassion for where they are coming from. Perhaps say “I’m really sorry to hear that you’ve had that experience. If I walked in your shoes, I’m pretty sure that I would see it that way too.” Don’t take their objections personally, and don’t see their objections as something you need to debate. Let them know that you care about them as a person whether they ever change their mind or not, and as opportunities allow, challenge them with thought provoking questions. “What would you say if I told you that Jesus was against religion too, and that it’s really all about relationship?” “What if there were churches out there that were actually different than the ones you have in your head?” “What if there were some really helpful insights about relationships, how to deal with difficult people, how to experience more peace and joy in your life at church?” “What’s the worst think that could happen if you joined me for one Sunday and we did lunch afterwards?”

8) Invite repeatedly

Studies show that one invite is rarely enough. It may take multiple invites before someone says yes. Pray for God's guidance on how frequently to check in with them and invite them. You don't want them to run when they see you coming. There is a fine line between persistence and nagging, so ask for God's guidance. Don't give up on your friend! Just because they say no today, doesn't mean no forever. Try again another time.

9) Share a Starting Point video with them

We have more than 200 videos online including: promo videos, highlight videos, stories of starting point videos, and all of our Sunday morning messages. Visit www.vimeo.com/startingpointchurch/collections to see these different video categories. Once you find a video you'd like to share, copy the link in your browser bar, and copy and paste it in an email or Facebook message.

10) Share Starting Point Church social media posts

Your friend's impression of our church can be shaped by what they see on your social media posts. Share moments of community, inspiration, fun, and insights from messages on your social media. Share our Facebook posts on your wall, retweet us from twitter, and post during our gatherings.

2 Things To Avoid If You're Going To Be a Great Inviter

1) Don't waste time, energy, and emotion trying to change who they are, what they believe, what they value, or how they behave. We often confuse whose job it is to change someone's life. Our primary job is to love and accept people as they are, the same way God loved and accepted us before we ever changed anything. Life change takes place from the inside out, and the starting point is always the same: God's unconditional love for us demonstrated on the cross (Romans 5:8). People are more likely to be persuaded when they see Christ in your life, not when you try and impose Christ on others.

2) Be careful with your social media posts. Some people think that using their social media is a great way to make a point about their opinions and viewpoints on religion, politics, morals, values, and controversies in the news. Generally speaking however, making your "point" rarely changes the minds of people who read your posts. Studies show that when people are confronted with a truth different than the one they embrace, they are far more likely to double down on their existing view, and pushback against your point. If you want to use your social media to make a point about something, by all means do so. Just understand that "making a point" and "making a difference" are very different things. Making a point will get you "likes" from others who see it as you do, but will alienate you from people who see it differently, and reduce the chances they will be receptive to your invite to church. Choosing to make a difference on the other hand is much more likely to persuade others who see it differently, and will keep them relationally engaged with you.