

A few words on behalf of those who are

SEEKING GOD

ARTICLE WRITTEN BY JEFF HOPPER

HERE'S A WARNING: I'm going to get sensitive about those who are seeking God. Maybe you already are. After all, it seems most everybody has something to say about "seekers."

Some folks are tremendously worried about seekers. They've talked to a lot of friends who fit this description. And these friends have needs—true emotional, spiritual needs. Chiefly, they need Jesus. And those who care about them are willing to do just about *anything* to get this message across: sing, dance, make movies, play golf, drink wine, invoke the popular, you name it.

And that has a whole lot of other folks sensitive in a whole other sort of way. They're worried too. Worried that what these seekers are getting isn't God, but rather a soft-sell gospel that takes the meat right off the bone, leaving little of value for these needy friends to chew on.

You see what I mean? Everyone is sensitive about seekers—those who are "seeker sensitive" and those who most decidedly are not!

But for a few minutes, I'd like to ask you to put aside the terminology, rid yourself of your sensitivities *about* seekers (and others who are trying to reach them), and remind yourself that you really are sensitive *toward* them, that you really do want them to meet Jesus.





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I am involved in the leadership of what can be described as an “affinity ministry.” That is, we meet people in a place of common enjoyment—in this case, sports. At its heart, our ministry is a missionary endeavor, where we look *first* toward the goal of people placing their faith in Jesus unto salvation and *second* to challenging these people to give Jesus greater and greater reign in their lives.

Let’s just say this: our ministry encounters a lot of seekers. The reason for this is that seekers these days look for God just about everywhere except church. I won’t speculate as to why this is the case; others have done this (I’m especially intrigued by the insights of Rick Howerton in *A Different Kind of Tribe: Embracing the New Small-Group Dynamic*). But they’re out there: people who really want to see if God is present and if He is real. I sure believe He is, and I want them to believe this too! So I work with the rest of our staff in finding the most appropriate ways to engage these seekers and let them see Jesus for who He is and for what He has done.

This requires a certain measure of sensitivity. If I desire them to recognize God as something finer than the china in a china shop, I sure don’t want to be the bull that chases them out. I want them to find just what it is they are looking for, which also happens to be just what I have to offer them: the

finest commodity in the universe. I want them to know and embrace the forgiveness and salvation of God.

With that desire leading us forward, allow me to make six strong recommendations for how you might approach seekers with sensitivity.

1. Greet all equally. This is really just about throwing the door open. We recognize that not every group is a good fit for everyone. Some people just won’t get comfortable in a particular group; but if they are made to feel welcome at the first group they encounter—yours, perhaps—then they are likely to keep on looking where there is a little better connection.

Understand that above all this means you will have to be prepared to welcome sinners of every kind (with the recognized exception of those who have sex crimes in their past; these people need groups of a closed variety). In order to do this kind of broad welcoming, it is likely that you will need to ask God to change your own heart on some matters: do that!

2. Assume not even the most basic Bible knowledge. Here’s a funny story. A man once checked in with one of our groups then, inspired to study more, went to a local Bible store and told the clerk he was looking for a Bible. The clerk asked, “Which translation would

you like?” to which our new friend replied, “English.” We’ve had others innocently ask, “What does the 316 mean when you say, ‘John 3:16’?” Remember, these are seekers, and they may need a lot more help than your long-time attendees. Give them that help without condescension—you want them to be forever grateful.

3. Be wary of insider language. In an affinity ministry like ours, we actually employ a lot of insider language—the kind that authenticates us to seekers. It’s akin to Paul’s Roman citizenship. But when it comes to language that is overly theological, we try to be careful. We don’t want people feeling like they are missing the gist of the conversation. At the same time, part of their personal growth and connection to the group will be their ability to understand important concepts, in the same way that a financier or a physician learn terms indigenous to their professions. The trick is to define nearly everything that might invite a question. You don’t have to give an exhaustive Merriam-Webster definition, but speak an aside that brings everyone into the circle of understanding.

4. Take teaching (or facilitating) seriously. What earnest seekers want more than anything

else is earnest adherence to the subject matter. Don’t follow rabbit trails. Steer clear of politics. Avoid pop psychology. Seekers can get these anywhere. They’ve come to your group to get the Bible. Give it to them!

5. Provide room for questions. Putting your own level of knowledge on the line can be scary. If you allow for dialogue, you just might find yourself being asked for an answer you don’t have. This is OK on several levels. For one, it requires you to defer to the vast nature of God. You can tell your inquirer that you are still doing a whole lot of learning yourself. Moreover, it sends you back to study more so that you can return with an answer. Allowing for questions sends a powerful message to those who are seeking God: you are listening to them. Which leads us to our last idea...

6. Know people’s individual needs by knowing people individually. Take time outside the group to meet and eat with those who are seeking. By getting to know them, you increase their sense of welcomeness. But more than this, you find out what is most on their minds and you can point future teaching in their direction. You become increasingly sensitive to your friends who are seeking!

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