

## **Question: Should a church be seeker sensitive?**

**Answer from GotQuestions.org:** In recent years a new movement within the evangelical church has come into vogue commonly referred to as "seeker sensitive." Generally, this movement has seen a great deal of growth. Many "seeker" churches are now mega-churches with well-known pastors who are riding a wave of popularity in the evangelical world. The seeker sensitive movement claims millions of conversions, commands vast resources, continues to gain popularity, and seems to be attracting millions of un-churched people into its fold.

So, what is this movement all about? Where does it come from? And, more importantly, is it biblical? Basically, the seeker-sensitive church tries to reach out to the unsaved person by making the church experience as comfortable, inviting, and non-threatening to him as possible. The hope is that the person will believe in the gospel. The idea behind the concept is to get as many unsaved people through the door as possible, and the church leadership are willing to use nearly any means to accomplish that goal. Theatrics and musical entertainment are the norm in the church service to keep the unsaved person from getting bored as he does with traditional churches. State of the art technology in lighting and sound are common components of the seeker-sensitive churches, especially the larger ones.

Expertly run nurseries, day care, adult day care, community programs such as ESL (English as a Second Language), and much more are common fixtures in the larger seeker churches. Short sermons (typically 20 minutes at most) are usually focused on self-improvement. Supporters of this movement will tell you that the single reason behind all the expense, state of the art tech gear, and theatrics is to reach the unsaved with the gospel; however, rarely are sin, hell, or repentance spoken of, and Jesus Christ as the exclusive way to heaven is rarely mentioned. Such doctrines are considered "divisive."

The seeker-sensitive church movement has pioneered a new method for founding churches involving demographics studies and community surveys that ask the unsaved what they want in a church. This is a kind of "if you build it they will come" mentality. The reasoning is that if you give the unsaved better entertainment than they can receive elsewhere, or "do church" in a non-threatening way, then they will come, and hopefully, they will accept the gospel. The mindset is to hook the un-churched person with great entertainment, give him a message he can digest, and provide second-to-none services. The focus of the seeker church then is not Christ-centered, but man-centered. The main purpose of the seeker church's existence is to give people what they want or meet their felt needs.

Further, the seeker-friendly gospel presentation is based on the idea that if you will believe in Jesus, He will make your life better. Relationships with your wife or husband, coworkers, children, etc., will be better. The message the seeker church sometimes

passes on to the unsaved person is that God is a great cosmic genie, and if you stroke Him the right way, you will get what you want. In other words, if you profess to believe in Jesus, God will give you a better life, better relationships and purpose in life. So, for all intents and purposes, the seeker-sensitive movement is a type of system based on giving unbelievers whatever they want. What too often happens in such a system is that people make a profession of faith, but when the circumstances of their lives don't immediately change for their material good, they forsake Christ, believing He has failed them.

How are people responding to the "seeker" movement? Many people have responded and begun attending seeker-sensitive churches. Many people, indeed, have come to faith in Christ as a result of a seeker-sensitive church. But the bigger question is, "What does God have to say about all this?" Is it possible for a movement to be successful from a human perspective, but be unacceptable to God?

The basic premise in the seeker-sensitive movement is that there are many people out there who are seeking God and want to know Him, but the concept of the traditional church scares them away from faith in Christ. But is it true that people are truly seeking God? Actually, Scripture teaches the exact opposite! The apostle Paul tells us that "there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God" (Romans 3:11). This means there is no such thing as an unbeliever who is truly seeking for God on his own. Furthermore, man is dead in his sin (Ephesians 2:1), and he can't seek God because he doesn't recognize his need for Him, which is why Paul says that there is no one who understands. Romans 1:20-23 teaches us that all unbelievers reject the true God. They then go on to form a god that is what they want (a god in their image or the image of something else). This is a god they can tame and control. Romans 1:18-20 says they knowingly suppress what they know about God through His creation and that they are subject to God's wrath, another doctrine studiously avoided by the seeker churches.

God's invisible attributes are clearly seen in creation, but unbelievers take that clear knowledge and revelation God has graciously provided and flatly reject it. This leads to Paul's statement in Romans 1:20 that they are "without excuse." What man finds when he seeks on his own is nothing more than a god of his own creation. Man does not seek for God; it is God who seeks for man. Jesus said that plainly in John 15:16, and John 6:44. The idea of thousands or even millions of unbelievers really searching for the true God is an utterly unbiblical notion. Thus, this movement is based on an unbiblical concept of the nature of the unsaved person, which is spiritually dead. A spiritually dead person does not seek God, nor can he. Therefore, there is no such thing as a seeking unbeliever. He does not understand the things of God until he is made alive by the Spirit of God (1 Corinthians 2:14).

Until the Father draws him (John 6:44) and the Spirit awakens the heart so he can believe and receive the gift of faith (Ephesians 2:8), an unsaved person cannot believe. Salvation is completely the act of God whereby He draws and empowers the dead

sinner with what is necessary to believe (John 6:37, 39-40). What part do we play in the salvation of others? God has commanded that we are the instrumentality through which the gospel is proclaimed. We share the gospel, but it is not our responsibility to make people believe, or even to try to be persuasive or manipulate them into believing. God has given us the message of the gospel; we are to share it with gentleness and reverence, but we are to share it, offensive parts and all. Nobody believes the gospel because a speaker is persuasive. People believe because of the work of God in their hearts.

God has not been vague on what His church is to be like. He didn't leave us guessing. He has given us direction on how men are to lead His church (Acts 6:1-6, 14:23; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Timothy 3:1-13; Ephesians 4:11), the ordinances of the church (1 Corinthians 11; Matthew 28:19), and the worship in the church "it is to be on the "Lord's Day" (Acts 20:7), and is to consist of preaching and teaching, prayer, fellowship (Acts 2:42) and the taking of an offering (Colossians 3:16). Here the seeker movement has missed the mark completely with its man-centered focus. When an unsaved person enters church, should our goal be to make him feel as comfortable as possible? When it comes to issues like our kindness, speaking respectfully, or even physical comfort, all who enter the church should be treated well. But the unsaved person should never feel "at home" in church, which is the body of Christ. The preaching and teaching of truth should make him feel very uncomfortable as he, hopefully, realizes the state of his soul, comes to know the existence of hell, and recognizes his need for the Savior. This discomfort is what brings people to Christ, and those who attempt to circumvent discomfort are not being loving. In fact, just the opposite is true. If we love someone, we want him to know the truth about sin, death, and salvation so we can help him avoid an eternity in hell. According to Paul, when an unbeliever enters the church and the Word of God is preached expositively (taught directly from the Scriptures), he will be convicted and called into account for his sin. The secrets of his heart are disclosed as he confesses and repents of his sin; this leads him to humble himself and worship the God who has provided the sacrifice for his salvation.

If we apply the standards of the seeker-sensitive movement to evaluate Jesus' ministry, we get some interesting results. Jesus was preaching to thousands, and in that sermon He clearly offends nearly all of those who hear Him. They desert Him, and "from this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him" (John 6:66). The Greek words in this verse mean they left and never came back. Jesus warned us that, far from healing our relationships with others, Christians will experience rifts in their closest relationships because of Him (Matthew 10:34-37). It is true that once we are saved life is better because we are reconciled to God and have a right relationship with Him. This provides the deepest peace that can be known. However, the rest of our lives will almost certainly be more difficult than before. God has said that we will experience persecution (Matthew 10:25), the rest of the world will look upon us as fools (1 Corinthians 1:18, 23), and we may even experience deep divisions in our own families all because of Christ (Luke 12:53). Jesus never intended for us to be popular with

unbelievers, saying instead that He came to bring not peace, but a sword (Matthew 10:34).

The basic philosophy, theology, purpose, and end of the seeker-sensitive movement are entirely man-centered. However, some would say that regardless of the purpose, motive, and outcome of the movement being wrong, we can't argue with the principle of getting the unsaved through the doors to hear the gospel. Certainly any exposure we can give the unsaved to the gospel is a great thing. However, the seeker-sensitive movement sometimes doesn't have the real gospel. Rather, it is a shell of the truth; it is hollow and void of the truths of sin, hell, and the holiness of God.

How is the rest of the body of Christ to respond to the seeker-sensitive movement? We are to "contend earnestly for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). We are to be all the more vigilant to model our churches after the instruction of Scripture. Eventually this movement, like all others which have come and gone over the years, will run its course and fizzle out. The seeker movement is large and well accepted, but it will eventually give way to the next fad, and in some ways that has already happened with the Emerging Church movement. Oddities within the church come and go, but the biblical church, like her Lord, endures forever.