



A LEADERSHIP EBOOK FOR PASTORS AND MINISTRY LEADERS

ENGAGE NOW

Discerning the Times and Reaching People on the New Digital Roman Road

AI, outreach, hospitality, and the future of evangelism - a research-informed guide for churches determined to carry an unchanging gospel into a rapidly changing world.

"Men who understood the times and knew what Israel should do."

1 Chronicles 12:32

A field guide for a changing mission field.

This eBook grows out of the message **Engage Now: AI, Outreach and the Future of Evangelism**. It was written for pastors and ministry leaders who feel the pressure of cultural change, digital acceleration, and a growing gap between the Church's passion for people and our ability to reach them effectively.

RESEARCH-INFORMED

Evidence where evidence matters.

Published statistics are endnoted and, where possible, drawn from primary or first-party sources such as Barna Group, Lifeway Research, Pew Research Center, the American Psychiatric Association, CTIA, Visa, and Harvard Business Review.

CLEARLY LABELED

Experience where experience matters.

VisitorReach client stories, operating observations, and ministry frameworks are presented as company experience or leadership recommendations - not as universally audited benchmarks.

Data integrity note

Some figures commonly repeated in church-marketing presentations are difficult to trace to a strong primary source. This edition intentionally updates, narrows, or omits those claims rather than repeating them for effect. Links were checked during preparation in August 2026.

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The urgency is not hype. The opportunity is real.

Pastor, I have spent most of my life inside the local church. I love the Church. I believe in the Church. I still believe the local church is God's great hope-filled community in a fractured world. But love for the Church requires enough honesty to admit when the world around us has changed faster than our ministry systems have.

We are leading in a moment where people can order dinner, choose a doctor, find a spouse, take a class, transfer money, ask an AI assistant a theological question, and make a major life decision from a device in their hand. Then Sunday comes, and many churches still expect the first meaningful connection to happen after someone has found the building, walked through an unfamiliar door, and entered a room full of strangers.

That is a very high barrier for someone who is anxious, skeptical, spiritually curious, or simply unsure what church will feel like. The mission has not become less urgent. The front door has moved.

THE BURDEN BEHIND THIS BOOK

We do not need a more digital gospel. We need to become more faithful missionaries in a digital world.

Technology can widen reach, reduce friction, and create space for conversation. It cannot pray for someone, discern the moment, carry compassion, or replace the presence of a Spirit-led believer.

My prayer for pastors reading this.

I am not asking you to chase every trend. I am asking you to become the kind of leader who can tell the difference between a trend, a tool, and a genuine shift in the mission field.

Some of what is happening around us is unsettling. Some of it is exhilarating. In the same moment that Christian identity has experienced long-term decline, recent research also points to renewed spiritual curiosity and rising interest in Jesus, particularly among younger adults.^{4,5} That tension matters. Decline and renewal can exist at the same time.

If all we see is decline, we become defensive. If all we see is opportunity, we become naive. The men of Issachar gave us another posture: understand the times, then know what to do.

My hope is that these pages help you lead with that kind of grounded faith. I want you to finish with a sharper theology of outreach, a clearer picture of the people in your city, and a practical path to make your church easier to discover, safer to approach, quicker to respond, and more personal long before the parking lot.



Marc Estes - pastor, author, and President / CEO / Co-Founder of VisitorReach.

***"Understand the times...
and know what to do."***

That is the leadership assignment of this book.

Contents - Part I & II

01	Introduction	7
02	PART ONE - UNDERSTANDING THE TIMES	10
03	Chapter 1 - We Aren't in Kansas Anymore	11
04	Chapter 2 - The Outreach Effectiveness Gap	14
05	Chapter 3 - Spiritually Open, Institutionally Cautious	17
06	Chapter 4 - The Digital Front Door	20
07	PART TWO - KNOWING WHAT TO DO	24
08	Chapter 5 - Recover the Gospel of Go	25
09	Chapter 6 - The One Still Matters	28
10	Chapter 7 - Give What It Costs	31
11	PART THREE - KNOWING HOW TO DO IT	34

Contents - Part III & Resources

01	Chapter 8 - From Likes to Engagement	35
02	Chapter 9 - The New Roman Road	38
03	Chapter 10 - Build the Path	42
04	Chapter 11 - AI and the Soul of Ministry	47
05	Chapter 12 - Tap Into the Moment	51
06	Chapter 13 - Build a Church That Can Respond	54
07	Conclusion - The Issachar Church	57
08	30-Day Field Guide	60
09	Resources	62
10	Endnotes + Sources	63
11	About Marc Estes	66

LEADERS OF ISSACHAR

The Church does not need panic, nostalgia, or novelty for novelty's sake. We need leaders who can read the moment without surrendering the mission.

The gospel does not change. The road people travel to hear it does.

ONICLES 12:32

men of Issachar unders
nes in which they live
new what to do.

Discernment must become action.

1Chronicles 12 describes a moment of national transition. Among the tribes rallying to David were the men of Issachar - leaders remembered because they understood the times and knew what Israel should do. Their gift was not simply observation. It was interpretation that led to action.

That distinction matters for church leaders. It is possible to become very informed and remain very ineffective. We can read every trend report, attend every conference, and still run outreach systems built for a world that no longer exists. We can also swing the other direction, chasing every new platform without asking whether it serves our theology, our people, or our mission.

Issachar leadership holds three things together: **truth that does not move, people who are always worth loving, and methods that must remain flexible.** Scripture gives us the mission. Culture gives us the context. Wisdom helps us build the bridge.

The three questions behind every chapter

1. What has changed?

How are people thinking, feeling, searching, trusting, and connecting differently?

2. What does Jesus show us?

What is timeless about presence, compassion, invitation, and one-to-one ministry?

3. What should we do now?

What practices, systems, and tools help us carry the mission faithfully into this moment?

STORY FROM THE ROAD

WHEN THE BRIDGE DISAPPEARED



THE ROAD CHANGED.
THE MISSION DID NOT.

As a teenager near Pollock Pines, California, I knew Blair's Bridge - an old wooden crossing that groaned under your tires and dared every local kid to look down at the river below. Eventually the county removed it. The surprise was that they never replaced it. A one-minute crossing became a three-hour detour, and slowly communities stopped visiting the other side. I have thought about that bridge often. When a familiar pathway disappears, people rarely work harder to reach us. They simply stop coming. The Church is still in the bridge-building business.

Adapted from The New Roman Road, Chapter 2 - What We Believe About the New Road.

Hold the tension: decline and openness.

62%

of U.S. adults identified as Christian in Pew's 2023-24 Religious Landscape Study, down from 78% in 2007.⁴

74%

of U.S. adults in Barna's 2022 survey said they wanted to grow spiritually.³

66%

of U.S. adults in Barna's 2025 tracking said a personal commitment to Jesus remained important to them.⁵

91%

of U.S. adults owned a smartphone in Pew's 2025 survey.¹⁰

The mission field is not disappearing. It is becoming more complex, more digital, and in many places more spiritually curious.

If we flatten the story into "America is becoming less Christian," we miss the signals of renewed interest. If we flatten the story into "revival is here," we ignore the structural challenges churches still face. Wise leaders read the whole field. That is why this book begins with the times before it moves to the tactics.

The goal is not to make us anxious about technology. It is to make us attentive to people.

UNDERSTANDING THE TIMES

Before we build a strategy, we have to understand the people we are trying to serve - their habits, hesitations, questions, and new pathways into community.

The gospel does not change. The road people travel to hear it does.

We Aren't in Kansas Anymore

Cultural change is not a side issue for ministry. It shapes how people hear, trust, search, and decide. The first leadership responsibility is to stop assuming yesterday's map still describes today's terrain.

AGE

ch and the
Evangelism

s | President-CEO V

The speed of change is itself a ministry reality.

The last several years have compressed change that once unfolded over decades. The pandemic accelerated remote work and digital dependence. Political polarization increased institutional distrust. Economic pressure changed household decisions. Artificial intelligence moved from research labs into everyday phones and browsers. Contactless behavior became ordinary. Social platforms fragmented into different generational ecosystems.

None of those developments automatically tells the Church what to believe. But all of them shape the environment in which people encounter what we believe. A pastor who ignores the environment may still preach truth, but the pathways people use to find, evaluate, and respond to that truth can be obstructed.

This is why cultural awareness is not compromise. Missionaries have always learned language, customs, fears, rhythms, and meeting places. Digital culture is not a different category of missiology. It is today's neighborhood.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

84%

of U.S. adults reported using YouTube in 2025; 71% used Facebook and 50% used Instagram.¹¹

95%

of adults ages 18-29 used YouTube; 80% used Instagram and 63% used TikTok.¹¹

Research lens: Pew's 2025 social-media study surveyed more than 5,000 U.S. adults and shows why a one-channel outreach strategy will miss large portions of the community.

STORY FROM THE ROAD

WHEN A BEEPER CHANGED THE ROAD



THE ROAD CHANGED.
THE MISSION DID NOT

Years ago in South Lake Tahoe, someone handed me a beeper. I wore that little box on my belt like I had joined the Secret Service. It looked ridiculous, but one buzz replaced hours of chasing people across town and playing phone tag from pay phones. It did not make us smarter; it made us more available. That old pager taught me a lesson I still carry: when the environment changes, wise leaders learn the tool and keep the mission moving.

Adapted from The New Roman Road, Chapter 3 - Holy Disruption.

Do not worship the map. Learn the terrain.

One of the easiest mistakes for experienced leaders is to confuse what worked with what is sacred. The gospel is sacred. Your 2018 communication plan is not. The Sunday gathering is sacred as an expression of the gathered church; the assumption that a stranger's first meaningful contact with your church must happen there is not.

The more rapidly culture shifts, the more often leaders need a rhythm of listening. What are people in your city searching for? Where are younger adults spending attention? What questions keep surfacing in pastoral conversations? What is making first-time guests hesitant? Which digital touchpoints feel welcoming, and which feel like institutional advertising?

Discernment asks, "What is happening?" Wisdom asks, "What should we do because of it?"

Chapter 1 checklist

-  Ask three people under 35 to describe how they would search for a church today.
-  Audit the platforms your church uses against the age groups you most want to reach.
-  Identify one outreach practice that exists mostly because "we have always done it that way."
-  Add a quarterly culture-and-community conversation to your leadership calendar.
-  Write down one method you are willing to change without changing the mission.

The Outreach Effectiveness Gap

Pastors still believe in evangelism. The uncomfortable question is whether our churches believe our current systems are actually reaching people who are not already connected.

ENDING
S

Passion can remain high while effectiveness falls.

BARNA

Pastoral confidence declined sharply.

63%

2015: pastors saying their church was at least somewhat effective at reaching the unchurched.

39%

2022: pastors saying the same - a 24-point decline.¹



Barna's data does not mean 61 percent of churches are failing at everything. It tells us something more useful: pastors themselves sense a growing mismatch between their mission and their outreach effectiveness. That is a leadership signal.

Lifeway Research adds another sobering data point. Its 2024 estimate found approximately 4,000 Protestant churches closed while 3,800 were started. The gap is far smaller than in 2019, which is encouraging, but closures still slightly outpaced openings.²

The response should not be shame. It should be curiosity. Where is friction entering the pathway? Are we visible? Are we inviting the right people? Do we create a personal response once someone raises a hand? Are we prepared to walk with people before they are ready to attend?

CHURCH STORY

WHEN A HIDDEN CHURCH BECAME VISIBLE

75

BEFORE

175

3 MONTHS

Las Vegas Christian Church said they had felt hidden in their own community. They were averaging about 75 people when they began using VisitorReach. Nine months later, attendance was averaging about 175, and guests were saying they wished they had found the church sooner. The issue was not a lack of love or a weak Sunday. The gap was discover-ability and connection. Once the road became visible, people who were already nearby found a way in.

VisitorReach client story - Las Vegas Christian Church. Results reported by church leaders; outcomes vary.

More activity is not always more outreach.

Churches are often full of activity. Calendars can be packed, volunteers can be stretched, and budgets can be committed while the actual number of meaningful relationships with unchurched or spiritually curious people remains small. The answer is not necessarily another event. It may be a clearer pathway.

Start by mapping the journey of a person who does not yet trust your church. Where do they first see you? What happens if they ask a question on Tuesday night? How quickly does a real person respond? What do you learn about them before they attend? What happens after their first visit? Where does the relationship become personal?

A useful diagnostic

Count meaningful conversations, not only impressions. Count names known, prayer needs heard, invitations accepted, first visits, next steps, small-group connections, salvations, baptisms, and stories of belonging.

Chapter 2 checklist

-  Write down your church's current outreach funnel from first discovery to belonging.
-  Identify the point where the greatest number of people disappear.
-  Choose three ministry outcomes that matter more than likes, reach, or raw attendance.
-  Review whether outreach has a real owner, not merely a shared intention.
-  Schedule one monthly review of outreach conversations and stories, not only campaign metrics.

CHURCH GROWTH STORY

FROM 80 TO 350 - WITHOUT CHANGING THE MISSION

80

AVERAGE

350

WEEKEND

2

SERVICES

A church in Austin had averaged about 80 people per service for nearly two years. They were faithful, consistent, and serving well, but growth felt stuck. After beginning VisitorReach, they started meeting people before Sunday - learning names, answering questions, and building a digital pathway into community. Two years later, the church reports averaging about 350 people across two weekend services. Technology did not preach the gospel or pastor the people. It helped the church find and engage people it had not been reaching before.

VisitorReach client story - Austin, Texas. Results reported by church leaders; outcomes vary.

Spiritually Open, Institutionally Cautious

The most important thing pastors can see right now may be this: skepticism toward institutions and openness to Jesus can coexist in the same person. That is not contradiction. It is our mission field.

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things and
the pand

People may be more open than we assume.

74%

wanted to grow spiritually in Barna's 2022 national survey.³

44%

said they were more open to God than before the pandemic.³

82%

in Barna's November 2023 data believed or were open to a spiritual or supernatural dimension.²¹

77%

of U.S. teens said they were at least somewhat motivated to keep learning about Jesus.⁸

These numbers should disrupt the assumption that our neighbors have simply become disinterested in spiritual things. Many are curious. Many are searching. Many are open to Jesus while remaining cautious about organized religion, unfamiliar church environments, or institutional claims.

Barna's 2025 research adds another hopeful signal: 66 percent of U.S. adults said they had made a personal commitment to Jesus that remained important to them, up 12 points from 2021. The increase was fueled significantly by younger adults.⁵ Pew's broader religious landscape research, meanwhile, shows Christian identification remains much lower than in 2007 even as the long decline has recently slowed or plateaued.⁴

The harvest can be spiritually open and still institutionally hesitant. Those are not opposites.

STORY FROM THE ROAD

ONE SEARCHING SOUL. ONE SIMPLE TEXT.



THE ROAD CHANGED.
THE MISSION DID NOT.

Herbert was 91 when he slowly typed a question to a church volunteer named Nick: did he have time to talk about heaven, hell, and whether God was real? Nick answered with a person, not a link. Texts became calls. Calls became prayer. Eight weeks later, Herbert surrendered his life to Jesus and asked to be baptized. The day after his baptism, he went home to heaven. Spiritual openness does not always look like a crowd. Sometimes it looks like one fragile text from one searching soul.

Adapted from The New Roman Road, Chapter 5 - People in a Digital World.

Lead with curiosity, not assumption.

When spiritually curious people feel that the only acceptable first step is to enter a service, they may delay indefinitely. But when the first step is a safe question, a text conversation, a prayer request, or a low-pressure invitation, the distance between curiosity and community becomes smaller.

This is especially important for younger generations. In 2026, two in five Protestant senior pastors told Barna they had seen higher engagement among Gen Z and Millennials in the prior year, and 40 percent saw increased engagement among men ages 18 to 35.⁷ In 2025, Barna also reported that Gen Z and Millennial churchgoers were attending more often than older churchgoers, even though the average frequency was still less than half of weekends.⁶

That combination should make leaders both hopeful and intentional. We cannot assume weekly attendance. We can assume that every touchpoint matters.

Chapter 3 checklist

-  Replace one "come to us" invitation with a question that invites conversation.
-  Create a simple way for someone to ask for prayer without attending first.
-  Train leaders to respond to doubt without defensiveness.
-  Ask a group of Gen Z and Millennial adults what makes church feel safe or unsafe to approach.
-  Celebrate spiritual curiosity as a beginning, not as a problem.

FREE REACH ASSESSMENTS

Measure what matters before you move.

VisitorReach offers two free five-minute assessments to help leaders move from instinct to clarity. One measures the outreach health of your church; the other helps you evaluate your own evangelism habits. Each provides a personalized report with practical next steps.



CHURCH REACH ASSESSMENT

**How effective is your church
at reaching people?**

Scores six areas of outreach health and gives your team a focused place to improve.

SCAN TO START

Free 7-page report



PERSONAL REACH ASSESSMENT

**How are you engaging others
with the Gospel?**

Evaluates five personal outreach areas so you can strengthen the habits behind a life of evangelism.

SCAN TO START

Free 7-page report

visitorreach.com/reach-assessments

The Digital Front Door

Hospitality begins before the parking lot. People often encounter your church through a phone screen before they ever encounter your greeters, your worship team, or your sermon.

Your first impression is increasingly digital.

Pew reports that 91 percent of U.S. adults own a smartphone, including 97 percent of adults ages 18 to 29 and 96 percent of adults ages 30 to 49.¹⁰ For many people, that device is not just a communication tool. It is the place where they search, compare, map, ask, watch, read, and decide.

A 2023 Liberty University mixed-methods study of recent church guests found that 66.3 percent had looked at a church website or social media before their first visit. Among those who did, about half said online information had caused them to decide not to attend a church at some point.¹³ The author disclosed an ownership interest in the church-marketing company that funded the research, so the finding should be read with that caveat. Still, it matches what pastors experience every week: people screen the experience before they enter it.

That means digital hospitality is not branding polish. It is pastoral preparation.

PEW - 2025

91%

smartphone ownership among U.S. adults.¹⁰

16%

are smartphone-only internet users without home broadband.¹⁰

STORY FROM THE ROAD

SHE HAD BEEN ATTENDING FOR A YEAR



THE ROAD CHANGED.
THE MISSION DID NOT.

One Sunday, Craig greeted Sophia at the front door and learned something remarkable: she had already been attending the church for a year - online. A social ad opened the first door. Weekly texts and livestreams became a lifeline while she battled terminal cancer. She never replied, but she read every message. Sophia promised God that if she became strong enough to leave home, her first outing would be to the church that had already become family. That Sunday, she kept the promise. The digital front door had been open long before the physical one.

Adapted from The New Roman Road, Chapter 7 - The Digital Front Door.

Reduce uncertainty before you ask for commitment.

1. Can I find you?

Is your church information consistent across search, maps, directories, social profiles, and your own website? Discoverability is the first layer of hospitality.

2. Can I understand you?

Can a newcomer quickly understand service times, location, kids environments, beliefs, accessibility, and what a first visit will feel like?

3. Can I talk to you?

Do your digital channels offer a path to a real conversation, or do they only broadcast information?

4. Will you remember me?

Once someone gives you a name, prayer request, or question, is there a system to follow up personally and consistently?

The digital front door is not a replacement for the physical church. It is the bridge that helps a hesitant person imagine walking through the physical door.



FREE RESOURCE

Take the VisitorReach Digital Health Assessment

Use the assessment as a leadership conversation starter around discoverability, digital hospitality, response pathways, and next steps.

Audit your church like a first-time guest.

Do not conduct this audit from the church office with insider knowledge. Ask someone who does not attend your church to search for it from scratch. Watch what they type, what they click, what confuses them, and what questions remain unanswered.

Then repeat the process on a phone, not just a laptop. Your digital front door should work for a person sitting in a car, on a lunch break, on a couch at midnight, or walking through a difficult season and quietly wondering if there is a church nearby that would care.

Hospitality question: If someone arrived digitally at 11:30 p.m. on a Tuesday with a spiritual question, what would happen next?

Chapter 4 checklist

-  Search "church near me" from a phone in your city and record what appears.
-  Verify your address, service times, phone, and website are consistent across major listings.
-  Make the first-visit experience easy to find in two taps or fewer.
-  Add a visible path to ask a question, request prayer, or start a conversation.
-  Test your website with a real newcomer and listen without explaining.

CHURCH PLANT STORY

THE CAMPUS OPENED WITH A COMMUNITY ALREADY WAITING

435+

LAUNCH

80%

VR PATH

DOZENS

MONTHLY

A church in New Orleans began building relationships before opening a new campus. When launch day arrived, more than 435 people attended. Church leaders estimate that roughly 80 percent came through the VisitorReach Church Plant strategy. The story did not end with launch weekend: dozens of new people continue visiting month after month. A campus can begin with a building, a team, and a service time. It can also begin with conversations already underway - names known, questions answered, and people who already feel invited before the doors ever open.

VisitorReach church-plant story - Southern California. Results reported by church leaders; outcomes vary.

KNOWING WHAT TO DO

Technology can tell us where people are. Jesus teaches us how to meet them there: with presence, compassion, patience, and a relentless focus on the one.

The gospel does not change. The road people travel to hear it does.

Recover the Gospel of Go

The Church has spent decades getting better at "come and see." Jesus never stopped teaching and modeling "go and find." We need both - but the imbalance matters.

TO DO
e they are a

Strategy must follow mission.

One of the most important lines in the original message is simple: **strategy must follow theology, philosophy, and values - not the other way around.** Digital outreach is not valuable because digital is modern. It is valuable when it helps us obey an ancient command more faithfully.

Again and again, Jesus moves toward people. He crosses social boundaries. He sees the person others overlook. He stops for interruption. He sits at tables. He asks questions. He makes truth personal. The Great Commission begins with a verb that sends us outward.

The Good Samaritan makes the principle almost impossible to miss. The wounded man cannot come to anyone. The Samaritan sees him and goes to where he is. He closes the distance before he ever asks the wounded man to move.

"When he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him..."

Luke 10:33-34, brief excerpt

Digital mission begins with the same movement: go to where people are.

STORY FROM THE ROAD

WE WALKED AT THE PACE OF TRUST



THE ROAD CHANGED.
THE MISSION DID NOT.

I met Bill at a small meetup. He was unsure about God and even more unsure about church. I gave him my number and sent a simple text the next morning: glad we met; praying for your week. A thread formed slowly - prayers, questions, a Bible, coffee, then a small group. We walked at the pace of trust. Nothing flashy. Just steady presence. That is the gospel of go: moving toward a person before asking the person to move toward us.

Adapted from The New Roman Road, Chapter 8 - Conversations That Become Community.

Go physically. Go relationally. Go digitally.

For generations, churches have rightly invited people to services, groups, Easter weekends, Christmas gatherings, and community events. We should keep inviting. But invitation cannot become the entire outreach philosophy.

A "come to us" strategy places most of the courage on the person who is already uncertain. A "go to them" strategy asks the church to carry more of the courage. It says: we will enter the places where questions are already being asked. We will listen before we pitch. We will create contact before we ask for attendance. We will build trust before we demand a decision.

Digital spaces are today's roads of commerce, conversation, curiosity, and community. They are not the only mission field, but they are undeniably one of them.

Chapter 5 checklist

- ☐ List the places your city already gathers physically and digitally.
- ☐ Choose one ministry pathway that asks your church to move toward people first.
- ☐ Review whether outreach language leads with people's needs or your events.
- ☐ Train leaders to ask good questions before giving answers.

DEEPER READING



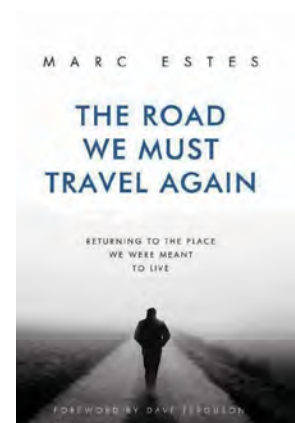
The Road We Must Travel Again

A companion resource on recovering the compassionate, outward-moving road Jesus describes in the Good Samaritan.

There's a road leaders were meant to lead on. In a time when culture is shifting and attention is fleeting, the Church doesn't need more noise, it needs courageous leadership that brings people back to the heart of the gospel.

The Road We Must Travel Again is a compelling call for pastors, pioneers, and ministry leaders to lead the way back to mercy, mission, and meaningful impact. Drawing from the parable of the Good Samaritan, this book challenges leaders to re-imagine their role, not as managers of ministry, but as carriers of compassion who chart the course toward presence, proximity, and power.

It's a fresh vision for building churches that don't just gather, but go. That don't just speak, but serve. This is your invitation to rise not with hype, but with humility. To build not just platforms, but people. To lead not from comfort, but with conviction. The Church is ready. The world is waiting. It's time to take the first step.



The One Still Matters

Mass reach can create awareness. Only people can create relationship. In a skeptical culture, one-to-one ministry is not an old strategy. It may be our most important one.

TO DO
really matter.



Jesus repeatedly found the one inside the crowd.

Zacchaeus was one person in a tree. Bartimaeus was one voice on the side of the road. The woman with the issue of blood was one touch in a crowd pressing around Jesus. The thief on the cross was one broken man in the final moments of his life. Scripture keeps returning us to a ministry pattern: Jesus can address a crowd without losing sight of a person.

Digital communication can easily pull churches in the opposite direction. We count reach, impressions, views, followers, and likes because those numbers are visible. They are not meaningless, but they are not the same as pastoral connection.

The better question is: how many people moved from seeing something to saying something? How many names did we learn? How many stories did we hear? How many conversations gave a person enough trust to take a next step?

CTIA - 2024 SURVEY

2.1T

SMS and MMS messages were exchanged in the U.S. in 2023 - more than 67,000 every second.¹²

The point is not that texting is automatically pastoral. The point is that it is a familiar, high-frequency human communication channel where personal conversation already happens.

STORY FROM THE ROAD

THE GOLD SWEATER TEXT



THE ROAD CHANGED.
THE MISSION DID NOT.

One of my favorite modern evangelism messages arrived on a Sunday morning: "I am by the info counter in a gold sweater. Do you see me?" That little text captures the shift. The person did not want more directions; they wanted to be known. The screen had already done its job. Now someone needed to look up, learn a name, and walk toward the one. Mass reach may create awareness, but ministry becomes personal when someone can say, "I see you."

Adapted from The New Roman Road, Chapter 2 - What We Believe About the New Road.

Conversation builds relational equity.

When someone tells a church what they are worried about, who they are praying for, why they stopped attending, or what they hope to find, they have given us more than data. They have given us trust. That trust must be stewarded.

This is why the most important response to digital outreach is not a clever automation. It is a real human who can listen, empathize, pray, answer, and follow through. Automation can open a door. AI can help draft a response. A journey can prevent someone from being forgotten. But ministry happens when a person feels known.

Every person should be known by name before they are known by attendance.

Chapter 6 checklist

-  Choose one metric that measures conversations, not just audience size.
-  Create a response standard for prayer requests and spiritual questions.
-  Train your team to use names and remember details without becoming intrusive.
-  Review whether your automated messages sound like your church.
-  Celebrate one-person stories in staff meetings as much as crowd numbers.

Give What It Costs

The Samaritan did not merely feel compassion. He rearranged his schedule, used what he had, paid a cost, and stayed engaged. Reaching people still requires time, talent, and treasure.

TO DO

Require your
and treasure.



TREASURE

You cannot automate compassion.

The Good Samaritan story moves quickly, but the cost is substantial. The Samaritan stops. He treats wounds. He uses his transportation. He changes his travel plan. He stays overnight. He pays the innkeeper. He promises to follow up. Compassion becomes logistics.

That is a useful correction for churches tempted to treat outreach as a campaign rather than a commitment. Digital tools may lower friction, but they do not eliminate the need for people who will carry conversations over time. If a church can generate interest but cannot respond, it has created a new form of disappointment.

Budget also reveals priority. I have challenged leaders to consider what a meaningful outreach allocation could look like in their context. The exact percentage is a leadership decision, not a biblical formula. The principle is that the Great Commission deserves more than whatever is left over.

Three resources every outreach strategy needs

Time

People need patient follow-up, not rushed transactions.

Talent

Teams need listening skill, pastoral judgment, digital fluency, and clear ownership.

Treasure

Reach, technology, training, and communication all require intentional investment.

CHURCH STORY

A FINANCIAL STEP OF FAITH



THE ROAD CHANGED.
THE MISSION DID NOT.

Iglesia Restaurando Naciones described starting VisitorReach as a financial step of faith. The ministry fruit was strong enough that the church chose to upgrade its plan and began encouraging other Spanish-speaking churches to consider the same road. Reaching people always costs something - time, attention, people, money, patience. The question is not whether outreach has a cost. The question is whether the people on the other side are worth it.

VisitorReach client story - Iglesia Restaurando Naciones. Results reported by church leaders; outcomes vary.

Do not generate more conversations than you can pastor.

One of the most responsible questions a church can ask before increasing digital reach is, "Who will own the response?" If the answer is vague, fix that before increasing volume. The person does not have to be a senior pastor. They do need training, authority, a clear escalation path, and protected time.

A strong system can distribute the load among staff and trusted volunteers. Quick replies can save time. AI can help draft. Automated journeys can handle routine touchpoints. But the human moments - grief, doubt, crisis, family pain, spiritual questions - need human judgment.

Chapter 7 checklist

-  Name the person accountable for digital outreach response.
-  Protect weekly time for conversations with people not yet connected to your church.
-  Review your outreach budget against your stated mission priorities.
-  Create an escalation protocol for crisis, self-harm, abuse, or complex pastoral needs.
-  Measure team capacity before increasing campaign volume.

VOLUNTEER STORY

ONE VOLUNTEER. HUNDREDS OF REAL CONNECTIONS.

400

ENGAGED

200+

VISITORS

91

FAMILIES

21/29

BAPTIZED

A Washington church empowered one volunteer to own the digital front door. In four months, the church reports roughly 400 engagements, more than 200 visitors, 91 families joining the church, and - in a recent baptism - 21 of 29 people baptized had come through VisitorReach.

One volunteer, with a clear system and a heart for people, became a bridge between a digital conversation and a church family. The lesson is not the software. The lesson is ownership: someone cared enough to answer, follow up, remember names, and keep walking with people.

VisitorReach client story - Washington. Results reported by church leaders; outcomes vary.

KNOWING HOW TO DO IT

A theology of going must become an operating system. The goal is not more technology. The goal is a clearer path from digital discovery to human relationship and spiritual next steps.

The gospel does not change. The road people travel to hear it does.

NG HOW
IT

From Likes to Engagement

Awareness is useful, but it is not the destination. The digital goal is to move from one-to-many exposure into one-to-one conversation.

Do not confuse attention with relationship.

Churches learned social media at the same time brands did, so we inherited many of the same metrics: impressions, likes, followers, views, clicks. Those numbers can tell us whether a message traveled. They cannot tell us whether a person was cared for.

A healthier digital outreach model treats one-to-many communication as a doorway. The content raises awareness, answers a question, or creates curiosity. Then the church offers an obvious next step into one-to-one communication: text us, ask for prayer, tell us what you are looking for, let us help you plan a first visit.

This changes creative strategy too. Instead of posting only crowds and stages, show people and stories. Instead of every call to action saying "Join us Sunday," create invitations to interact before Sunday.



The webinar emphasized advertising that creates a path to engagement, not awareness alone.

CHURCH STORY

NOT LIKES. REAL CONVERSATIONS.

50+

CONVERSATIONS

1

WEEKEND

New Life had used social media marketing before, but in its first weekend with VisitorReach more than 50 people engaged in actual conversations. Not likes. Not impressions. Conversations.

That is the line leaders must watch. Attention is useful, but only when it opens a road toward a name, a story, a prayer, and eventually a relationship. The goal is not simply to be seen. The goal is to create a next step where people can be heard.

VisitorReach client story - New Life. Results reported by church leaders; outcomes vary.

When someone raises a hand, respond while the question is still warm.

Research outside ministry reinforces a simple human principle: response speed matters. A Harvard Business Review analysis of 1.25 million sales leads found that companies contacting an online inquiry within an hour were nearly seven times as likely to qualify it as firms that waited even one hour longer, and more than 60 times as likely as firms waiting 24 hours or more.¹⁴

People are not sales leads, and ministry should never treat them that way. But the behavioral insight is relevant: when someone has just expressed interest, the moment has energy. A church that waits two days to reply can unintentionally communicate that the question did not matter.

The ministry goal is not relentless speed. It is dependable presence.

Chapter 8 checklist

-  Define your target response window for digital inquiries.
-  Create coverage for evenings and weekends without exhausting staff.
-  Rewrite three calls to action so they invite conversation rather than only attendance.
-  Track the number of meaningful replies generated by each campaign.
-  Review the first five messages people receive and remove institutional language.

The New Roman Road

The Roman road system carried people, commerce, ideas, and eventually the gospel across the ancient world. Today, digital networks form another kind of road system. The Church should learn how to travel it.

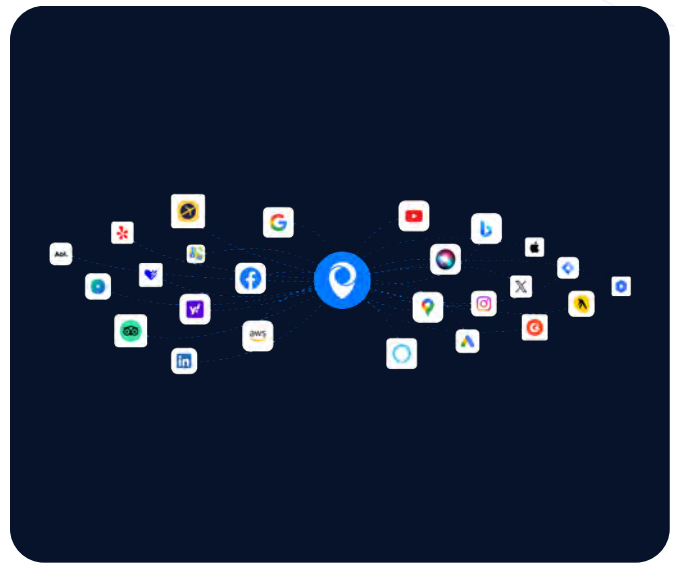
MARKETS
AND
REACH.

Be present where people already search.

The modern digital landscape is not one road. It is a web of search engines, maps, voice assistants, social platforms, video, websites, directories, messaging, and increasingly AI interfaces. Different generations enter through different routes. Pew's 2025 data makes that fragmentation visible: YouTube reaches majorities across every age group, while Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, and Reddit skew much younger.¹¹

An omni-channel approach does not mean your church must master every platform. It means the essential information about your church should be accurate and discoverable across the places people are likely to look, and that every channel should lead toward a coherent next step.

This is where local listings, map visibility, website clarity, social content, and direct conversation stop being separate departments and become one journey.



VisitorReach's omnichannel framework illustrates a practical principle: many roads can lead toward one personal conversation.

STORY FROM THE ROAD

WHEN VIDEO PREACHING SOUNDED RADICAL



THE ROAD CHANGED.
THE MISSION DID NOT.

In 2002, I sat in a staff meeting when Frank Damazio asked, "What if we preached by video to another campus?" The room went quiet. We prayed, fasted, debated, searched Scripture, and refused to let either fear or novelty make the decision.

Months later, we launched one of the earliest multisite efforts in the nation. It was not perfect, but it taught me something permanent: the Church does not need to worship new roads or fear them. We need conviction strong enough to know when to step onto them.

Adapted from The New Roman Road, Chapter 4 - The Moment We Are In.

Discovery. Curiosity. Conversation. Community.

01 - DISCOVER

Be findable

Accurate listings, map visibility, search, social, video, voice, and a clear website.

02 - ENGAGE

Invite a response

Content and campaigns should create a reason to ask, pray, learn, or connect.

03 - CONVERSE

Make it personal

Move quickly into a two-way human conversation with a name and a need.

04 - CONTINUE

Nurture the journey

Use thoughtful follow-up to help people visit, return, belong, and take spiritual next steps.

The goal of omni-channel is not to be everywhere for visibility's sake. It is to make it easier for the right person to find a caring church at the right moment.



READ DEEPER

The New Roman Road

Marc Estes' book-length exploration of reaching people in the new digital frontier.



What happens when the Church keeps preaching, but fewer people are listening? When our methods stay familiar, but the world has changed lanes. The New Roman Road is a call to return to the heart of evangelism with fresh eyes and faithful courage.

Marc Estes invites readers to rediscover the gospel's power for real people in real places, and to reach them where they actually live today: online, in everyday conversations, and in the quiet moments of searching that happen long before someone ever walks into a church.

With conviction, clarity, and practical steps, this book equips leaders and believers to move from passive Christianity to mercy-driven mission, turning digital space into holy ground and everyday believers into confident witnesses.

Build one road system, not twelve disconnected tools.

Many churches already own enough technology. The problem is fragmentation. The website does one thing, social does another, a form lands in an inbox, a volunteer manages a spreadsheet, and follow-up lives in someone's memory. The person experiences the gaps.

The leadership move is integration. Every channel should answer the same questions: Who owns this? Where does the data go? What happens next? How soon does a person hear from us? How do we know whether they took a next step?

If a platform does not help you discover, engage, converse, or continue the relationship, ask whether it deserves the attention it consumes.

Chapter 9 checklist

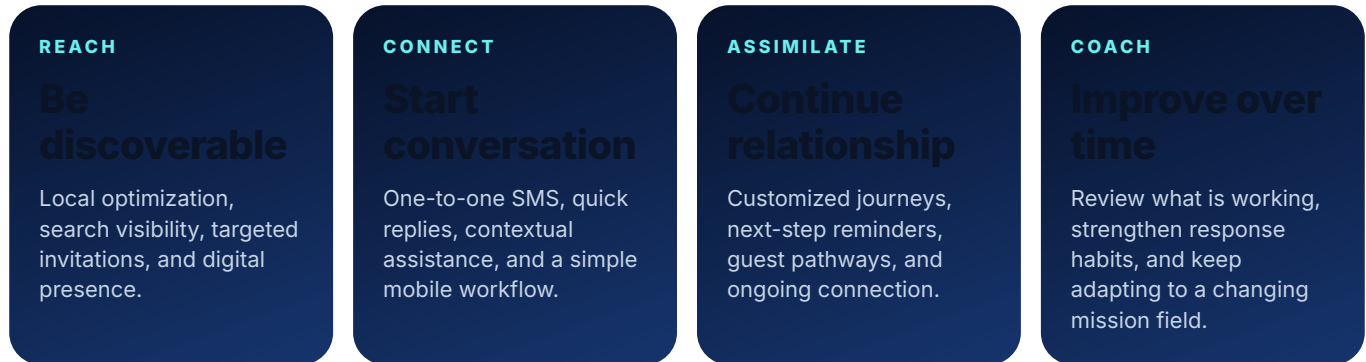
-  List every digital channel where people can encounter your church.
-  Verify each channel points to a clear, current next step.
-  Remove duplicated forms and dead-end inboxes.
-  Assign one owner for consistency across local listings and maps.
-  Draw the data flow from first click to personal follow-up.

Build the Path

A healthy outreach system does not end when someone responds to an ad or attends once. It should help people move from discovery to conversation, from conversation to community, and from community toward discipleship.

Reach. Connect. Assimilate. Coach.

VisitorReach uses a four-part framework because it helps churches see the whole journey rather than overinvest in one stage.



The framework is a practical expression of the theology developed in the previous chapters: go where people are, move toward the one, reduce friction, and keep caring after the first moment.

COMPANY FRAMEWORK

VisitorReach describes its platform as a conversational outreach system built by pastors for pastors, designed to move one-to-many digital reach into one-to-one SMS conversations and continued follow-up.¹⁷

STORY FROM THE ROAD

A PATH BUILT FOR SOMEONE ON THE ROAD



THE ROAD CHANGED.
THE MISSION DID NOT.

Lydia lived out of a suitcase and traveled most weekends. One night in a Denver hotel, spiritually hungry and exhausted, she found a church livestream and typed into the chat, "I want God, but I cannot get to church. Is there a way for someone like me to belong?"

Because the church had built a path, the answer was yes. Prayer led to salvation, online Next Steps, a digital small group, leadership development, serving, generosity, deep relationships, and eventually a rooted life. A pathway works when it keeps moving people forward.

Adapted from The New Roman Road, Chapter 9 - The Road To Formation.

Do not lose people between "interested" and "known."

Most church systems are strongest at the two ends. We know how to create public communication, and we know how to welcome people who physically arrive. The middle is where opportunity often disappears.

Someone clicks. Someone fills out a form. Someone asks a question. Someone says they are new to town. Someone shares a prayer need. Those are not administrative events. They are pastoral moments. A good system should surface them quickly and make the next action obvious to the person responsible.

VisitorReach reports that its platform uses local listings, targeted digital strategies, automated NurturePoints, and a mobile app to help churches identify and nurture conversations with local seekers. Outcomes vary by church and market, so treat company-reported ranges as operating experience rather than guaranteed results.^{17,20}



The webinar emphasized simple two-way communication that leaders can manage from a mobile workflow.

The back door closes when people become known.



Automated journeys should support a human pathway - not replace it.

Assimilation is often treated as a sequence of reminders: first visit, welcome email, next-step class, group invitation. Those are useful. But the deeper goal is belonging. People stay where they are known, needed, and helped to take meaningful steps.

Automation is best used to create consistency around what humans are trying to do. It can make sure nobody is forgotten. It can remind the team when to check in. It can provide the right information at the right time. It should not make the journey feel mechanical.

EXPLORE THE FRAMEWORK



VisitorReach

See how VisitorReach approaches digital outreach, 1:1 conversation, assimilation, and coaching. No pricing is included in this guide.

**SCHEDULE A
CONVERSATION TODAY!**

Make the path visible to your team.

A pathway becomes culture when every leader can explain it. Your staff should know what happens when a seeker responds, who replies, how information is recorded, what happens before a first visit, what happens after, and when responsibility shifts from outreach to assimilation to groups or pastoral care.

If the pathway only exists in one leader's head, it is not yet a pathway.

Chapter 10 checklist

-  Draw your Reach - Connect - Assimilate - Coach pathway on one page.
-  Assign an owner and response standard for every transition.
-  Create a consistent way to record prayer needs and important context.
-  Review automated journeys for warmth, clarity, and relevance.
-  Coach the system monthly using stories and outcomes, not software usage alone.

LEADERSHIP STORY

THE DRILL WAS CHARGED. THE SCREWDRIVER WON.



THE ROAD CHANGED.
THE MISSION DID NOT.

One Tuesday night I watched an AVL coordinator mount a screen with a simple screwdriver while a charged drill sat in the closet and three volunteers stood nearby. The screen went up, but it took twice the time and nobody learned anything. I walked back to my office and wrote a sentence: "Train them to build the people who build the work." The problem was not heart, vision, or volunteers. It was an equipping gap. Good systems are not only documented pathways. They are pathways people understand well enough to carry, teach, and reproduce.

Adapted from The New Roman Road, Chapter 11 - Empowering Teams, Culture, and Craft.

AI and the Soul of Ministry

AI is becoming part of the spiritual formation environment whether pastors are ready or not. The question is no longer whether people will use it. The question is whether the Church will offer wisdom for how.

Reach™

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People are already bringing spiritual questions to AI.

In 2026, Barna reported that nearly half of practicing Christians had already turned to AI for personal growth, largely without pastoral input.¹⁶ That should get every church leader's attention. For centuries, spiritual questions moved through families, pastors, books, teachers, and communities. Now an AI interface can become the first place a person asks about prayer, doubt, doctrine, relationships, or meaning.

The pastoral response cannot simply be fear. Nor should it be uncritical enthusiasm. AI can help summarize information, draft communication, surface patterns, translate, brainstorm, and reduce administrative load. It can also produce confident errors, flatten nuance, and create the illusion of relationship without actual presence.

The more capable the tool becomes, the more important it is to define what belongs to the tool and what belongs to the shepherd.

Use the tool. Guard the heart. Never outsource discernment, doctrine, empathy, or pastoral responsibility.

AI can assist the work of ministry. It cannot become the minister.

STORY FROM THE ROAD

WHEN AI CALLED HELEN "HELL"



THE ROAD CHANGED.
THE MISSION DID NOT.

One pastor prayed into a phone and watched the auto-captions turn Helen's name into "Hell." Funny? Absolutely. Harmless? Not always. The glitch became a reminder that AI can carry language, summarize, draft, and accelerate, but it cannot discern the soul in front of us. Use the tool. Check the output. Keep a human in the loop. Let algorithms carry the load; let shepherds carry the people.

Adapted from The New Roman Road, Chapter 6 - The Rise of AI and the Soul.

Human-in-the-loop is not a technical phrase.

It is a ministry conviction.

Use AI to assist

- Draft a first response a leader can edit.
- Summarize a long conversation before a handoff.
- Suggest compassionate wording when a volunteer feels stuck.
- Help create FAQs consistent with church teaching.
- Reduce repetitive administrative work.

Keep humans responsible

- Final theological judgment and doctrine.
- Crisis and mental-health escalation.
- Confidential pastoral care.
- Discernment about tone, timing, and spiritual sensitivity.
- Prayer, presence, accountability, and relationship.

VisitorReach describes its AI Conversational Assistant, developed in partnership with Gloo AI, as a draft-and-edit tool intended to help pastors respond faster while keeping the church team in control of the conversation.¹⁸

VISITORREACH RESOURCE LIBRARY

Keep learning. Keep leading.

The digital mission field keeps moving, and leaders need trusted ideas they can use. The VisitorReach blog includes dozens of key articles designed to empower you and your church to become more effective in the digital age.



SCAN THE BLOG

visitorreach.com/blog

Practical articles for pastors and teams:

- Outreach strategy and evangelism
- Church marketing, search and SEO
- AI, church technology and digital ministry
- VisitorTap and frictionless next steps
- Church trends, leadership and guest experience

Write your AI theology before your AI policy.

A church's AI policy should begin with both theology and anthropology, before strategy.

What do we believe a person is? What do we believe shepherding requires? What is the role of embodiment, community, confession, wisdom, and authority? Once those convictions are clear, the technology boundaries become easier to define.

For example: a church may allow AI to suggest a reply but require a trained human to review before sending. It may use AI to organize FAQs but not to invent doctrinal positions. It may use AI to help identify recurring questions but never use sensitive pastoral data to train an uncontrolled system.

The goal is not to be the most advanced church in your city. The goal is to be the most trustworthy church you can be in an advanced world.

Chapter 11 checklist

-  Write three ministry tasks AI may assist and three it may never own.
-  Require human review for pastoral messages generated by AI.
-  Create a simple data-privacy rule for sensitive conversations.
-  Teach your congregation how to use AI without replacing Scripture, community, or trusted leaders.
-  Review your AI practices quarterly as tools and risks change.

Tap Into the Moment

People have already been trained to tap. NFC turns that familiar behavior into a frictionless ministry next step - giving, connection, check-in, prayer, events, information, and follow-up.

OGY N

Make the next step easier than the hesitation.

Every extra step creates a decision. Open the camera. Find the QR code. Aim correctly. Wait for focus. Click the link. Re-enter information. Download an app. Search for a page. None of those steps is impossible, but friction compounds.

NFC uses a behavior millions of people already know from contactless payment. Visa reported that in fiscal 2025, tap-to-pay accounted for 79 percent of its face-to-face transactions globally and 66 percent in the United States.¹⁵ That does not prove people will use a church tap product, but it demonstrates that the physical gesture is mainstream.

For churches, the opportunity is simple: place the next step where the moment happens. A guest can tap at a seat, a parent can tap near kids check-in, a volunteer can tap at a ministry station, or someone can tap to open a customized menu of church links.



VisitorTap products use NFC to open a church-selected destination without requiring a special app download.

VISITORTAP STORY

LESS FRICTION. MORE RESPONSE.

1,400%

ENGAGEMENT

25

1ST SUNDAY

Jesus Culture reported a 1,400% increase in engagement after moving from QR codes to VisitorTap, with more sign-ups, more conversations, and more giving in a single month.

Life Church in Williamsburg reported 25 digital connections on the first Sunday it implemented VisitorTap, without the hard-copy paperwork and added admin burden it was used to. Sometimes the next step is not a bigger campaign. It is simply making the response easier in the exact moment someone is ready.

VisitorTap church stories - Jesus Culture and Life Church Williamsburg. Results reported by church leaders; outcomes vary.

Technology works best when context makes the action obvious.

A tap device is not a strategy by itself. Placement, language, destination, and follow-up matter. "Tap here" is weaker than "New here? Tap to tell us how we can help." A giving tap should lead directly to giving. A prayer tap should lead to a simple prayer pathway. A kids-area tap should open the information a parent needs in that moment.

VisitorTap's official product description emphasizes NFC access to links such as connect cards, giving, event sign-ups, and custom TapTrees, with no special app or QR scan required.¹⁹ The leadership principle is broader than the product: remove unnecessary friction from meaningful next steps.



RESOURCE

Explore VisitorTap

See NFC products, TapTree examples, and ministry use cases. Pricing is intentionally omitted from this eBook.

**GIVE US A CALL TODAY
TO START A CONVERSATION!**

Chapter 12 checklist

-  Walk your building and identify five moments where people need a next step.
-  Remove one unnecessary step from your connect-card process.
-  Match each tap or QR destination to the exact context where it is placed.
-  Test every link monthly from a guest's phone.
-  Connect form submissions to a real follow-up pathway.

Build a Church That Can Respond

The best outreach technology in the world will fail if no one owns the conversation. A responsive culture is built through staffing, training, rhythms, coaching, and spiritual maturity.

Systems scale what culture already values.

If your church values people but your system takes three days to respond, the person experiences the system. If your church values prayer but prayer requests disappear into an inbox, the person experiences the inbox. If your church values hospitality but nobody owns digital follow-up, the person experiences silence.

This is why digital outreach is ultimately a culture project. Technology can create visibility and structure. Leaders create expectations. Teams create the experience.

A healthy response culture has clear ownership, response windows, escalation paths, coaching, prayer, and review. It also knows when to slow down. Not every conversation is a funnel. Some people need months of patient relationship before attending anything.



Coaching creates a rhythm for reviewing conversations, learning from outcomes, and keeping outreach personal.

CHURCH STORY

REACH ONLY MATTERS IF WE CAN RESPOND

602+

ATTENDED

The Father's House says its team is talking with people every day, hearing stories, praying personally, and then watching those same people walk through the doors. In another update, the church reported at least 602 people - plus connected family members - had come to church since starting VisitorReach.

More reach only matters if a church can respond. Systems do not replace shepherding; they help shepherds keep up with the people God is bringing.

VisitorReach client story - The Father's House. Results reported by church leaders; outcomes vary.

What gets reviewed gets improved.

A monthly outreach review can be one of the most valuable meetings on your calendar if it is focused on people rather than dashboards. Read a few conversation threads. Celebrate what happened. Notice where replies felt cold or overly scripted. Ask which questions are repeating. Review how many people moved toward a visit, a group, a prayer conversation, or a decision to follow Jesus.

Then adjust the system. Update an FAQ. Change an ad. Rewrite a quick reply. Clarify a handoff. Add a volunteer. Reduce volume if the team is overwhelmed. Increase it if the church has capacity.

VisitorReach describes coaching as part of its ongoing approach because the cultural and technological environment keeps changing.¹⁷ Even if you never use VisitorReach, the principle is worth adopting: outreach strategy should be coached, not merely installed.

Chapter 13 checklist

-  Schedule a monthly digital outreach and assimilation review.
-  Read real conversations with appropriate privacy safeguards.
-  Track prayer needs, first visits, return visits, next steps, salvations, and baptisms where appropriate.
-  Coach tone and empathy, not just response speed.
-  Adjust volume to match the team's capacity to care.

CONCLUSION

THE ISSACHAR CHURCH

A church that understands the times does not become trend-driven. It becomes mission-ready.

The gospel does not change. The road people travel to hear it does.

CONCLUSION

The moment is asking something of us.

There are seasons when the biggest leadership risk is moving too fast. There are also seasons when the bigger risk is assuming the environment will return to what we knew. I believe this is the second kind of season.

People are spiritually curious. Younger generations are showing signs of renewed engagement. At the same time, institutional trust is complicated, attendance rhythms are less predictable, anxiety is high, and digital behavior shapes how people evaluate nearly every part of life. The Church does not need to panic about any of this. We do need to respond.

The future of outreach will not be won by the church with the most technology. It will be shaped by churches that use technology to become more present, more personal, more responsive, and more faithful.

**Use every tool available.
Never let a tool replace
prayer, presence,
discernment, or the
sacred work of loving
one person well.**

Understand the times. Know what to do. Then do it with courage.

FIELD STORY

THE DOORS WERE NOT OPEN YET. THE RELATIONSHIPS WERE.

700+
CONNECTED

430+
LAUNCH

8
SALVATIONS

Before ZOE Church opened its South Bay campus, the team had already connected with more than 700 people in the community through VisitorReach. Launch Sunday drew more than 430 people, with eight saying yes to Jesus. The striking part is what happened before the doors opened: names were learned, conversations began, and people who had never entered the building already knew someone on the inside. That is an Issachar kind of church - understanding the moment and moving toward people while the opportunity is open.

VisitorReach case study - ZOE Church South Bay. Results reported by church leaders; outcomes vary.

Seven commitments for the next season.

We will be findable.

We will make it easier for spiritually curious people to discover a trustworthy local church.

We will be personal.

We will measure names, stories, conversations, and next steps - not attention alone.

We will be responsive.

We will not let sincere questions sit unanswered because ownership is unclear.

We will be wise with AI.

We will use technology to assist people, not to replace people.

We will reduce friction.

We will make the next spiritual step simple, visible, and accessible.

We will coach what we build.

We will keep learning from real people and changing our methods when needed.

We will keep the gospel central.

Our methods may change quickly. Our message, our love for people, and our dependence on the Holy Spirit must not.

Turn the book into action.

Do not try to rebuild everything at once. Use the next 30 days to create clarity, remove friction, and strengthen one-to-one response.

WEEK 1

See the field

Interview newcomers. Search your church from a phone. Map channels. Review current outreach metrics.

WEEK 2

Fix the front door

Correct listings, clarify first-visit pages, simplify forms, and add conversation pathways.

WEEK 3

Build response

Assign ownership, set response standards, train tone, and create escalation rules.

WEEK 4

Launch and coach

Run one focused campaign, review conversations, celebrate stories, and adjust the pathway.

Your 30-day goal

Make it easier for one spiritually curious person in your city to find you, talk to you, trust you, and take a next step.

CHURCH PLANT STORY

LAUNCH DAY WAS THE BEGINNING, NOT THE FINISH LINE

250+

LAUNCH

The Southern California campus story did not stop at a strong opening Sunday. More than 250 people attended launch, with church leaders estimating that about 80 percent came through the VisitorReach Church Plant strategy.

80%

VR PATH

Since then, dozens of additional people have continued visiting month after month. That is what a healthy road does: it keeps carrying people after the big moment is over. The goal is not one impressive weekend. The goal is a repeatable pathway that keeps helping spiritually curious people find the church, start a conversation, and take a next step.

DOZENS

MONTHLY

VisitorReach church-plant story - Southern California. Results reported by church leaders; outcomes vary.

Digital outreach readiness checklist.

Discoverability

- ☐ Google / map information is accurate.
- ☐ Service times and location are easy to find.
- ☐ Website clearly serves first-time guests.
- ☐ Social channels are current and coherent.

Conversation

- ☐ People can ask a question or request prayer digitally.
- ☐ Response ownership is explicit.
- ☐ Response time is measured.
- ☐ Pastoral escalation rules are documented.

Assimilation

- ☐ First-visit follow-up feels personal.
- ☐ People are invited toward clear next steps.
- ☐ Journeys do not feel robotic or excessive.

Leadership

- ☐ Outreach has budget, time, and a leader.
- ☐ AI boundaries are written.
- ☐ Monthly coaching and review are scheduled.

STORY FROM THE ROAD

A TUESDAY TEXT CHANGED A HOUSE



THE ROAD CHANGED.
THE MISSION DID NOT.

A pastor at a small church had been praying for a young mom who slipped in and out quickly on Sundays. One Tuesday he sent a short message: "I am glad you were with us Sunday. How can we carry something for you this week?" She replied, "Please pray for my son. He is scared at night." The pastor sent a short Scripture and a bedtime prayer she could read with him. A month later, mother and son were sitting near the front, smiling. Heaven did not send a press release. A house was different. A heart was different. The church felt different.

Adapted from The New Roman Road, Chapter 12 - Tomorrow's Roads Today.

Keep learning. Keep building.

These resources are included to help leaders move from insight to implementation. No pricing is included in this eBook.



VisitorReach

Explore aiChurchTech, conversational outreach, assimilation, and coaching.



VisitorTap

Explore NFC-based connection and custom TapTree experiences.



Digital Health Assessment

Use a practical assessment to evaluate your church's digital front door.



The New Roman Road

Go deeper into the theology and practice of digital evangelism.



The Road We Must Travel Again

A pastoral call to recover compassionate, outward-moving ministry in the spirit of the Good Samaritan.

Website: visitorreach.com **Start a conversation:** connect.visitorreach.com/welcome

Research behind the book.

Primary and first-party sources were preferred where available. Research findings are summarized rather than treated as promises of ministry outcomes.

1. Barna Group.

How Are Christians Learning to Share Their Faith? (Aug. 16, 2023). Pastor confidence in being at least somewhat effective at reaching the unchurched fell from 63% in 2015 to 39% in 2022; 12% said their church was very effective at encouraging Christians to share faith.

<https://www.barna.com/research/christians-share-faith/>

2. Lifeway Research / Baptist Press.

Lifeway Research finds church closures eclipse openings (Jan. 13, 2026). Lifeway estimated 3,800 new Protestant churches started and 4,000 closed in 2024, based on data from 35 denominations or faith groups representing 58% of Protestant churches.

<https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/lifeway-research-finds-church-closures-eclipse-openings/>

3. Barna Group.

Rising Spiritual Openness in America (Jan. 18, 2023). In an October 2022 survey of 2,000 U.S. adults, 74% said they wanted to grow spiritually, 77% believed in a higher power and 44% said they were more open to God than before the pandemic.

<https://www.barna.com/research/rising-spiritual-openness/>

4. Pew Research Center.

2023-24 Religious Landscape Study (Feb. 26, 2025). 62% of U.S. adults identified as Christian, down from 78% in 2007. Pew also found the Christian share had been relatively stable since 2020, suggesting the long decline may have slowed or leveled off.

<https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2025/02/26/religious-landscape-study-executive-summary/>

5. Barna Group.

Belief in Jesus Rises, Fueled by Younger Adults (Apr. 7, 2025). 66% of U.S. adults said a personal commitment to Jesus remained important to them, a 12-point increase from 2021; younger adults were major drivers of the increase.

<https://www.barna.com/research/belief-in-jesus-rises/>

6. Barna Group.

Young Adults Lead a Resurgence in Church Attendance (Sep. 2, 2025). Among churchgoers, Gen Z averaged 1.9 weekends per month, Millennials 1.8, while churchgoers overall averaged 1.6.

<https://www.barna.com/research/young-adults-lead-resurgence-in-church-attendance/>

7. Barna Group.

Are Young Adults Engaging More at Church? What Pastors Are Seeing (Mar. 9, 2026). 45% of Protestant senior pastors reported higher Gen Z engagement, 42% higher Millennial engagement, and 40% increased engagement among men ages 18-35.

<https://www.barna.com/trends/young-adults-church-engagement-pastors/>

8. Barna Group.

52% of Teens Are 'Very Motivated' to Learn About Jesus (Jan. 30, 2025). 77% of U.S. teens said they were at least somewhat motivated to continue learning about Jesus throughout their lives (52% very, 25% somewhat).

<https://www.barna.com/trends/teens-curious-about-jesus/>

9. American Psychiatric Association.

American Adults Express Increasing Anxiousness in Annual Poll (May 1, 2024). 43% of adults said they felt more anxious than the prior year; 70% were anxious about current events, 68% about family safety, and 63% about health and bills/expenses.

<https://www.psychiatry.org/news-room/news-releases/annual-poll-adults-express-increasing-anxiousness>

10. Pew Research Center.

Mobile Fact Sheet (Nov. 20, 2025). 91% of U.S. adults owned a smartphone; ownership was 97% among ages 18-29 and 96% among ages 30-49. 16% of U.S. adults were smartphone-only internet users.

<https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/fact-sheet/mobile/>

11. Pew Research Center.

Americans' Social Media Use 2025 (Nov. 20, 2025). 84% of U.S. adults used YouTube, 71% Facebook and 50% Instagram. Among ages 18-29, 95% used YouTube, 80% Instagram and 63% TikTok.

<https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2025/11/20/americans-social-media-use-2025/>

12. CTIA.

2024 Annual Survey Highlights (2024). Americans exchanged more than 2.1 trillion SMS and MMS messages in 2023 - more than 67,000 messages per second.

<https://www.ctia.org/news/2024-annual-survey-highlights>

Research behind the book.

Primary and first-party sources were preferred where available. Research findings are summarized rather than treated as promises of ministry outcomes.

1. **13. Larry D. Witzel, Liberty University.** *Use of Church Websites and Social Media by Guests to Reduce Uncertainty* (Dec. 10, 2023). Among 303 respondents who had first visited a church within five years, 66.3% looked at the church website or social media beforehand; among those, 50.2% reported deciding not to attend a church because of online information. The author disclosed an ownership interest in the church-marketing company that funded the research.
<https://larrywitzel.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Use-of-Church-Websites-and-Social-Media-by-Guests-to-Reduce-Uncertainty.pdf>
2. **14. Oldroyd, McElheran & Elkington.** *The Short Life of Online Sales Leads* (Harvard Business Review, Mar. 2011). Analysis of 1.25 million sales leads found firms contacting an inquiry within an hour were nearly seven times as likely to qualify it as firms waiting even one hour longer and more than 60 times as likely as firms waiting 24 hours or longer. This eBook applies the response-speed principle to ministry but does not equate people with sales leads.
<https://hbr.org/2011/03/the-short-life-of-online-sales-leads>
3. **15. Visa.** *Fiscal 2025 Annual Report / Tap to Everything* (2025). Visa reported Tap to Pay represented 79% of face-to-face transactions globally and 66% in the United States in fiscal 2025.
<https://www.sec.gov/Archives/edgar/data/1403161/000140316125000089/v-20250930.htm>
4. **16. Barna Group.** *Four Trends Shaping Ministry Strategy This Year* (Jun. 2, 2026). Barna reported that nearly half of practicing Christians had already turned to AI for personal growth, largely without pastoral input.
<https://access.barna.com/articles/four-trends-ministry-strategy-2026>
5. **17. VisitorReach.** *Official website, features, FAQ and get-started pages* (Accessed Aug. 2026). VisitorReach describes its aiChurchTech platform as a conversational outreach system built by pastors for pastors, using digital optimization, targeted outreach, one-to-one SMS, journeys, and coaching.
<https://www.visitorreach.com/>

Research behind the book.

Primary and first-party sources were preferred where available. Research findings are summarized rather than treated as promises of ministry outcomes.

1. **18. VisitorReach.** *AI Designed for Churches* (Accessed Aug. 2026). VisitorReach describes its Gloop AI-powered Conversational Assistant as an editable draft-response tool intended to help churches respond faster while keeping human leaders in control.
<https://www.visitorreach.com/blog/ai-designed-for-churches>
2. **19. VisitorReach.** *VisitorTap / FAQ* (Accessed Aug. 2026). VisitorTap is described as an NFC-based church engagement tool that opens church-selected links without a special app or QR scan and can connect to customized TapTrees and follow-up pathways.
<https://www.visitorreach.com/visitortap>
3. **20. VisitorReach internal observations.** *Webinar and client field experience* (2026). The live message includes VisitorReach operating observations, case studies, response patterns, and ministry frameworks. These are not independently audited national benchmarks and individual church results vary.
<https://www.visitorreach.com/>
4. **21. Barna Group.** *Connecting the Spiritually Curious to Christ* (Oct. 25, 2024). Based on November 2023 data, 82% of U.S. adults said they believe or are open to the possibility of a spiritual or supernatural dimension, 74% desired spiritual growth, and 79% affirmed belief in a higher power.
<https://www.barna.com/research/spiritually-curious/>

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Marc Estes



Marc Estes - President / CEO / Co-Founder, VisitorReach

Marc Estes is a seasoned pastor, leader, author, and speaker with a passion to help churches reach people more effectively. He previously served as Senior Pastor of Mannahouse in Portland, Oregon, where he led a large multi-campus church, and served as President of Portland Bible College.

Today, Marc serves as President / CEO / Co-Founder of VisitorReach, helping equip churches for evangelism, digital outreach, assimilation, and meaningful one-to-one connection in a rapidly changing culture. His recent books include *The Road We Must Travel Again* and *The New Roman Road*.

"Hospitality now begins before the parking lot."



ONE FINAL THOUGHT

The next person God wants your church to reach may already be looking for you.

Make it easier for them to find you. Make it safe for them to talk. Make the response personal. Then walk with them toward Jesus and toward community.



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