



STEVENS CREEK C H U R C H

Seven Steps to a New Life

By: Pastor Marty Baker

When we started Stevens Creek Church, Patty and I had a heart to reach people who were far from God. But we didn't know how to do it. I had a doctorate in ministry, but couldn't figure out how to fulfill Jesus' calling on our life – to seek and save the lost! That's when we visited Willow Creek Community Church in Chicago and they introduced us to seven steps that would change our ministry. It's the clearest way I've ever encountered to take people who do now know Jesus Christ and turn them into fully devoted followers. In fact, now our goal at Stevens Creek Church is to help people take their Next Step toward God. So today, let's explore what those seven steps actually are.

1. Be nice to people.

We must be intentional with *building a relationship* with people outside the faith. It begins with being nice to people. If lost people really matter to God, then they ought to matter to the church. I say this over and over here at Stevens Creek. If you do not walk away with anything else, please remember to be nice to people that you meet. **You** may be the only sermon that your

friends ever hear. We have convinced ourselves that we live in a Christian nation, but this is not the case.

Many un-churched people, though they live in America, are insulated from Christianity. Your un-churched friends do not listen to Christian radio; they do not watch Christian television; their lives are not touched by billboard and bumper-sticker evangelism. Our most effective means of reaching our community is to develop relationships with people God brings our way. God will use these relationships to *open the door of faith*.

It is important, as Christ followers, to leave room in our hearts for people outside the faith. We need a growing compassion for irreligious people.

A lot of us are growing in knowledge, in power of worship, in anointing, and in serving, *but are we growing in tenderness toward lost people?*

If we are not careful, we will become increasingly isolated from the people that we've been called to reach. Take a risk, step out and build a relationship with an unchurched person. You may be the critical link for someone in their spiritual journey. Some of you work in environments where you're the only Christian. *You're* the only Bible some people read. You're the only replica of Jesus they lay eyes on.

We must make friends with unchurched people. But let's be practical:

- **Where do you shop?** All of us buy groceries, go to restaurants, dry cleaners, clothing stores, and other places, right? With just a little forethought, those regular errands can become evangelistic opportunities.
- **What do you do for fun?** Think about your recreational activities: You may play golf, be a part of a bowling league, Little League Baseball or be a member of hunting and fishing clubs. *Use these as avenues to create friendships.*

I coached basketball and baseball in the Columbia County Rec. Department for ten years. That was years ago, but I still have people come to The Creek and say, “You were my coach.” Maybe sports is not your thing. Look at your interests, your civic and community involvements. Ask God to open the doors for spiritual conversations along the way.

- **What relationships do you already have established?** Could it be that God wants to use you as a light in the relationships that you have *already* formed? I believe that after you establish an authentic relationship, God will open the door for you to share your story. That’s the second step.

2. **Tell your story.**

During this time, God is going to be working behind the scenes with these conversations. He will prompt your friend to ask a question. You need to be prepared to simply answer the questions that come your way in the best way

you can. We don't beat people over the head with the Bible. We simply want to help them take their next step toward God.

When they ask a question, use this as an opportunity to tell your story. Tell them what God has done in your life. Don't be overly religious. Be like try to be the Apostle Paul, just use words that they understand. Don't be pushy. Allow the Holy Spirit to work in the situation.

God wants your friend in His family more than you do. He is going to be working behind the scenes so that your conversations can become spiritual conversations. Then, there will come an opportunity for you to go to step three.

3. **Invite them to a service.**

Make the ask. Take a risk. The Bible encourages us to go and compel people to come to God's house. **Luke 14:23** says, ***"Then the master told his servant, 'Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in, so that my house will be full.'"***

We all have been commissioned by God to *invite* our friends to church. When I was a kid, the choir director at my home church encouraged the congregation to invite a friend every week. He said, "If everyone would bring a friend next week, our attendance would double." His words were good in theory, but no one ever invited their friends. In fact, the church is smaller today than it was back then.

Why? *Why didn't we invite our friends? We were afraid to.* We did not know what was going to happen from week to week. What if something weird happened, how would we explain it? Several years ago, we decided to create a service that would engage seekers and inspire believers. We wanted a user-friendly approach to Christianity. We wanted every Sunday to be a "Friend Day." We wanted a service that would speak to our generation.

We worked, and still work, to create a service that our friends want to come to.

I need you to do what I can't do, and I will do what you may not be able to do. I can't invite your friends but I can work to present the message in a way that they can understand it. If you are brand new to the Creek, we want you to do one thing and one thing only: **come back on Sunday.**

This is a safe place for you. You will not be forced to participate. You will not be pressured to respond, but week after week you can watch and listen and challenge the claims of Christ. Then open your heart and see if Christ is real. *I believe like so many others here that you will be changed and you will be saved.*

4. **Attend weekly.**

When a person begins to attend regularly, that's when they come to the place in the process where they trust Christ as Savior and begin a process of growth. We want you to become a worshipper. This is the point where people begin to understand what it means to worship God. The worship service at Stevens Creek is a place where the Spirit of God can meet with His people. Worship is

the vehicle through which we express our love to God. It also is the vehicle through which God does something in the hearts of us, His people. As people worship God they discover a passion for His presence, increased joy, faith, and love for God's Word and for God Himself.

If you have accepted Christ, then your next step is to be baptized. Then, go through **Next Step Class**, which just helps you get connected. Here's another way to do that:

5. **Join a small group.**

We believe that life change takes place in community. One of the ways, we encourage community here at The Creek is to further develop their Christian walk by participating in a small group.

Connecting with people in a small group is not an optional sub-ministry of the church – *it is the Church.*

Small groups come in a lot of different forms. Some are Bible Study groups, some are activity groups or service groups. We don't want you to do life alone. Within the context of a small group, members care for one another, and share in each other's lives through accountability, prayer and intentional acts of service to one another. They experience a growing knowledge of God and themselves, and they serve God and the church.

6. **Volunteer regularly.**

Believers who consider Stevens Creek their church home are encouraged to discover, develop and use their spiritual gifts in *some way* within the church. God is giving you an opportunity to be a part of something that He is doing. There is nothing like it! When you are able to be a part of something that is changing lives, it is so gratifying. God has gifted you: He has given you a heart, your personality, your experiences and he is giving you an opportunity to use them for good.

7. **Love enough to give.**

We want you to love the Lord and love this church so much that you are willing to give your hard-earned money to help continue the ministry. God has blessed you and me and we have an opportunity to be a blessing to people who are not here yet. Think about it: *It takes money to do ministry*. Do you realize that people who came before you gave money so that you could drive into this property and place your kids in a children's ministry so that you could experience this service? It's time that we focus on those who are not here yet. The Bible has a percentage giving plan called **tithing**. For centuries Christ followers have set aside 10 percent of their income to keep the work of the Lord strong in their community.

We believe that God blesses generous people. We want you to love this church so much that you would be willing to give.

When you look at these seven steps, where do you see yourself?

That's the good news. Jesus came to seek and to save. It doesn't matter what you have done, Jesus wants you to be a part of his family no matter which step you're currently on.

But are you willing to take your next step?