



# 5 & 1/2

## *STEPS TO A FANTASTIC GUEST EXPERIENCE*

### SOLUTION GUIDE

The ministry ideas, how to's, tips, and advice you need to create a fantastic guest experience PLUS... how our software, Realm®, can help you achieve this ministry goal.

# EXPERIENCE VS. IMPRESSION

People go back to places like Las Vegas, Miami, New York City, and San Francisco because of their culture, people, and sights. They don't go back because of their first impression. These cities provide something more than a good time; they provide experience.

## THE CHURCH SHOULD BE ABLE TO PROVIDE A BETTER EXPERIENCE THAN A TOURIST TRAP.

They always say first impressions matter. No person should leave a church feeling negative or critical.

## AN IMPRESSION IS PENSIVE. AN EXPERIENCE IS *IMMERSIVE*.

More and more churches are noticing an important shift in church culture. What happened in the '80's and '90's was an attractional church model that said, "look at us; we have a lot to offer." And that's fine; the Church does have a lot to offer, and it does want to attract people to the faith.





A good shift is occurring. It's about shifting the focus from "us" to "you." It's as simple as suggesting, "Look at you, how can we help?"

This subtle difference changes everything about how your church should see a new visitor. You no longer need to convince them that you're the best. Instead of pandering for praise, you should seek to immerse them in the experience that is Church.

It's pivoting from showmanship to shepherding, from impression to compassion, from boasting to hosting, and from artificial to authentic.

### **THE POINT: *IT'S NOT ABOUT YOU.***

It's all about using what God has given you to truly connect with your guests so they leave having the experience of a lifetime.

If they have a fantastic experience, they'll be back, and then you can plug them into purpose at your church and see God do something amazing!

# ***SO LET'S GET STARTED***

# STEP

# 1



## ***MAKE IT INTERESTING***

Okay, I know I just said it's not about showmanship, but still, people are people, and part of a great experience is to make it memorable, interesting, and fun.

Why do you think you were drawn to the title of this guide? Was there something about the "½" step that piqued your curiosity?

Why do movie geeks wait until after the super-long credits of an Avengers movie? Because there is something intriguing about what's next.

In some ways, the genius of the Marvel cinematic universe is it gives viewers a buy-in to the story line, or at least a sense of it. This keeps people interested because they become active participants in an unfolding story instead of passive onlookers at something that's already happened.



The Christian faith is interesting too! It is past, present, and future. It encompasses a spiritual realm, the entire universe, personal emotions, and complex relationships.

A disciple's journey, from guest to Christ-follower, doesn't have to be boiled down to the most basic, simple three-step program. Yes, you need to give people simple next steps (see Step #5), but next steps can't be a substitute for intrigue and vision.

#### Vision Casting - 201

If you're reading this, then there is a 99.9% chance that you've also read (or heard) about the importance of vision casting.

Casting a clear and bold vision is essential to making a guest experience interesting. However, the key point here is to make the vision accessible and applicable to every guest. When crafting a vision, you have to ask these questions:

- How will others join in?
- What are the outcomes in their lives?
- How will they impact their community by living out this vision?
- How do we make it their vision, instead of just ours?

**THE GOAL IS TO MAKE YOUR VISION  
ADAPTABLE AND ADOPTABLE FOR YOUR GUESTS.**

A background image showing a person's legs and feet as they climb a rock face. Several sneakers are hanging from the climbing rope. The word "RELATIONSHIPS" is written in a bold, black, brush-stroke font across an orange horizontal bar.

# RELATIONSHIPS

People are interesting. When they know you're interested in them, it leaves a good impression. When your interest in them produces a genuine response, it becomes an experience.

Let's say a new visitor walks in and your greeter asks him about his family, or what he does. The visitor responds "I'm a welder." OK, good. You've shown interest and your visitor feels important. Now let's say your greeter asks another more in depth question in response. Boom. Now a connection has been made. Your guest will remember this experience, and it will draw them back to your church. That goes beyond making an impression to creating an experience.

You might have heard of the FORD acronym for small talk. It suggests that you start conversations around topics related to family, occupation, recreation, dreams.

When you let people talk about what matters most in their lives, they are experiencing what it feels like to belong.

Think through how your church is forming relationships that are less about you and more about the lives of your guests.

# WORSHIP

Worship is about connecting with God as we acknowledge His greatness and goodness. We can't elaborate on all the nuance and application of worship in the context of this guide (and yes, we know we worship through WAY more than just music). But if your worship service, and the time you focus on worship through music, doesn't feel like an experience to you, it definitely won't to a guest.

If your church has become apathetic to the expression of worship, your visitors will pick up on it and wonder to themselves, "What's the point?" And really, what is the point?

In the Bible, when people were worshipping, it rocked their world. Shouldn't it at least influence ours?

**CHALLENGE QUESTION: HOW IS YOUR CHURCH CREATING A WORSHIP EXPERIENCE INSTEAD OF A WORSHIP SERVICE?**





# MESSAGING

The goal of information is transformation. If your messages and churchwide messaging is not inspiring people to grow, change, and experience God, it's missing the mark.

## YOUR COMMUNICATION ABOUT EVENTS SHOULD INSPIRE PEOPLE TO ATTEND.

Your messaging about groups should motivate people to sign up.

Your sermons should help people renew their mind and be transformed.

And so on.

Ask yourself these questions:

- What am I even saying here?
- Is there a more creative way to say this?
- Will people understand my intent?
- What is the call to action?
- Would I respond to this?
- What else do I have to say to motivate people?
- What am I saying that's cluttering the message?

*If your messaging isn't clear, interesting, and actionable, it'll fall on deaf ears.*

**OVERALL, THE MAIN GOAL IS TO INVITE PEOPLE INTO THE GREAT EXPERIENCE YOU ARE ALREADY ENJOYING AND MAKE IT EASY FOR THEM TO JOIN IN.**

**STEP**

**JESUS**

**2**

## ***KEEP IT REAL***

My grandma used to always tell me, "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care."

And I added, "And people can spot a fake a mile away."

More than ever, people are fed up with the hypocrisy and facade they've felt or experienced in church. When the things we preach and the actions we take don't line up, people leave.

The good news is there is more grace for leadership, staff, and volunteers to be open and honest instead of performance oriented.

If you can't admit struggles or flaws, people won't be able to relate. If you talk one way on stage and another at the coffee shop, it won't add up.

When people suspect you're not keeping it real, that'll translate to them that your concern, encouragement, and teachings aren't real either.

Consequently, this will leave visitors feeling like they just don't fit in.

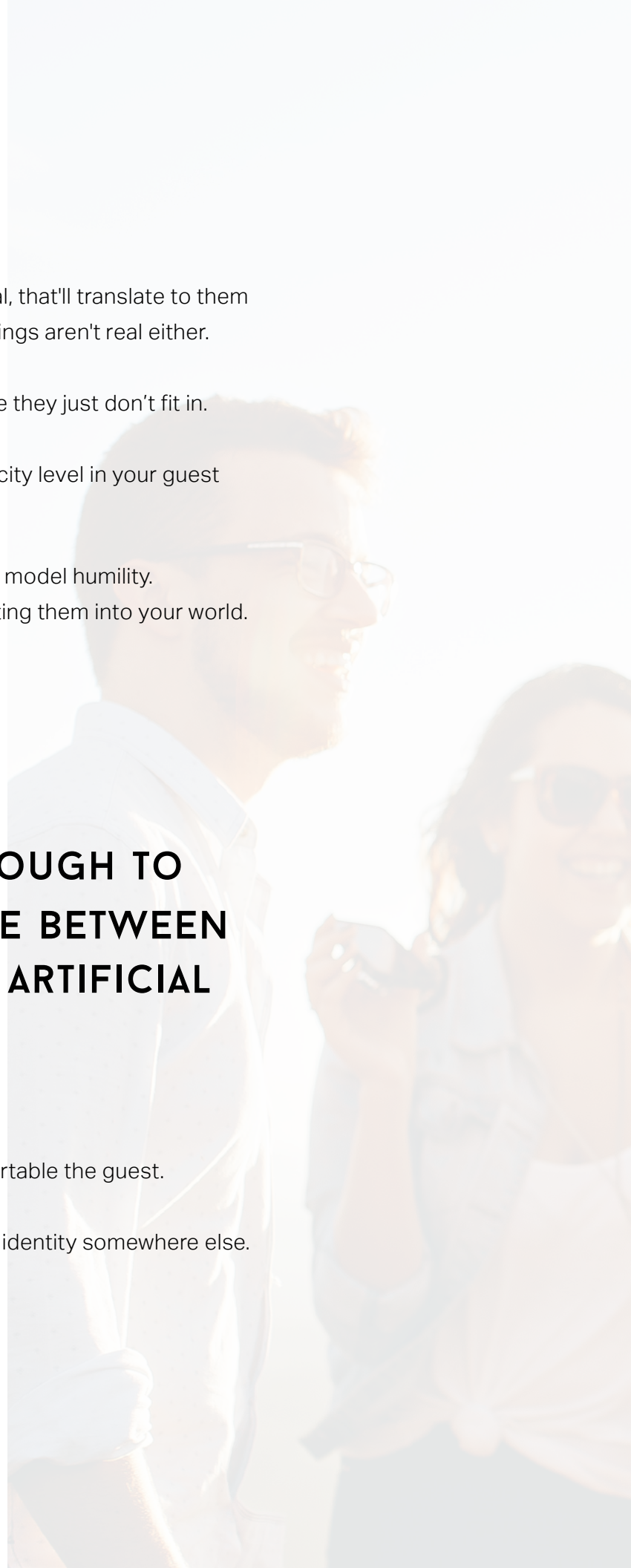
Here are a few easy ways to raise the authenticity level in your guest experience:

- Encourage greeters and volunteers to model humility.
- Share personal tidbits with guests, letting them into your world.
- Let your kids be greeters.
- Serve food.
- Be vulnerable.

## **PEOPLE ARE SMART ENOUGH TO KNOW THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN AN AUTHENTIC AND AN ARTIFICIAL CHURCH.**

The more real the experience, the more comfortable the guest.

If your visitors can't identify with you, they find identity somewhere else.





**STEP**

**3**

## ***ELIMINATE CONFUSION***

Have you ever tripped in public? What's your first response?

For me, I tense up and either put on a false confidence or a fake laugh. Either way, my guard shoots up.

When people at your church feel awkward, the defenses go up and connection becomes almost impossible. Nothing makes people feel quite as awkward as being confused.

Confusion creates a disorientation that leads to defensiveness.

**THE BEST WAY TO DEFUSE THE DEFENSE IS TO  
ELIMINATE CONFUSION.**

To eliminate confusion you can:

- Clearly mark thoroughfares and destination points.
- Don't assume people know what you know about where stuff is.
- Provide an outline of the service flow at the beginning of service.
- Describe what will happen in kids' ministry.
- Put all the basic information online.
- Help people get a handle on things before a visit.
- Share the same narrative.
- Let people know what you're about with clarity.

**IF YOU LET YOUR COLLECTIVE GUARD DOWN,  
SO WILL YOUR VISITORS. BE REAL SO YOU CAN  
MAKE A REAL CONNECTION.**

# STEP



# 4

## ***GET THE KIDS RIGHT***

This might not be true for you, but for a vast majority of churches, families make up the largest demographic. A big reason for that is because parents who have left the church want to get a foundation of faith for their kids. Many parents who have never been part of a church feel an urge to give their kids some kind of religious or moral background. Christianity is a religion that makes much of the family, so it stands to reason that there are going to be a lot of kids.

With such a high focus on families, figuring out your children ministry is important.

Most important, parents **MUST** know their kids are safe. Also, the check-in process needs to provide clear information and avoid long waits in lines.

You have to convey confidence, safety, and substance so parents feel that their kids will be protected and get what they came for.



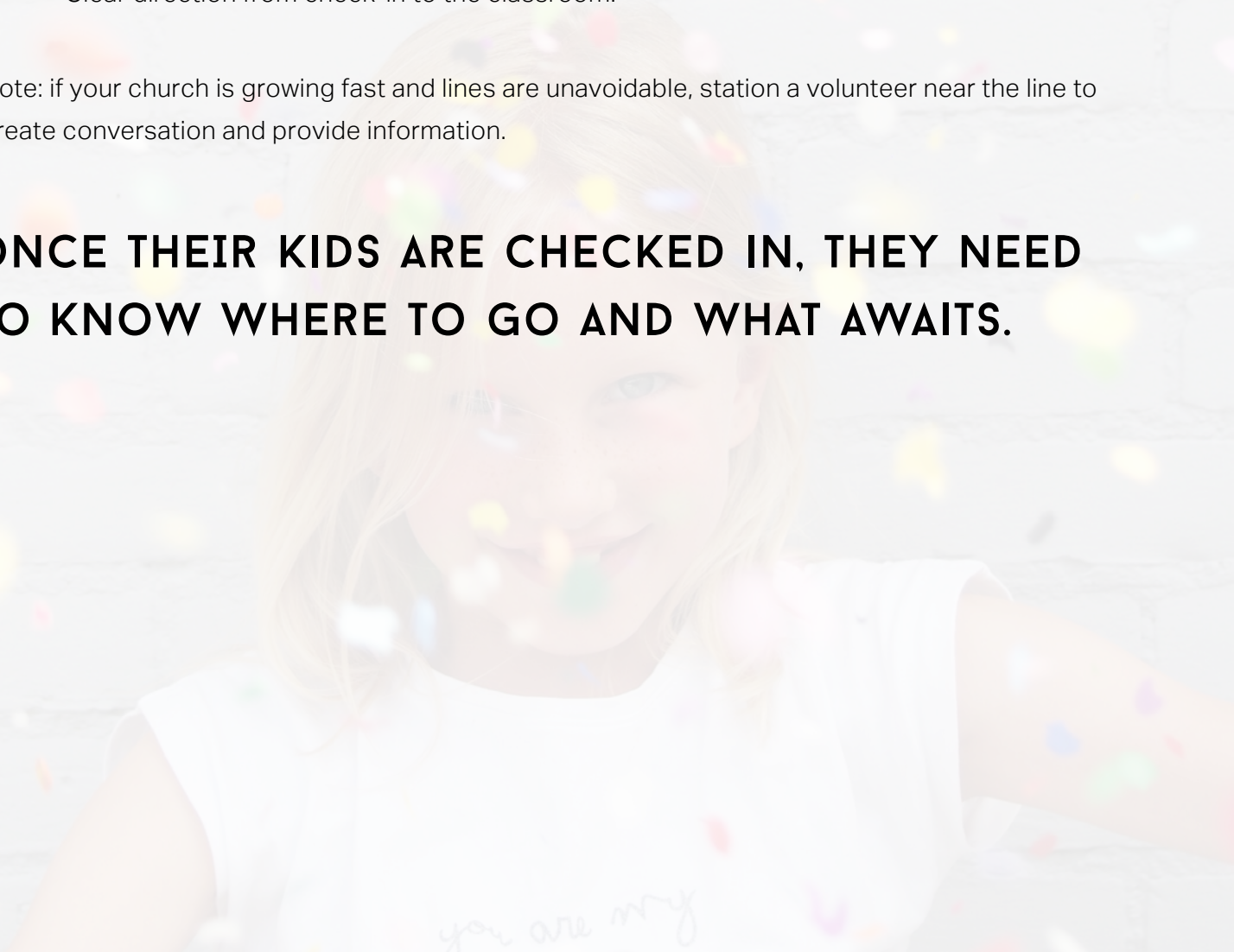
# **IT STARTS WITH CHECK-IN**

It's the 21<sup>st</sup> century. You've got to have a fast, reliable, versatile, and (hopefully) online check-in process. It should consider:

- Emergency and safety information including contact info, medical needs, and allergy alerts.
- Parent and child registration in a database.
- Information for parents that tells them what is in store for their kids and what safety measures are in place.
- Short lines and even shorter wait times.
- Clear direction from check-in to the classroom.

Note: if your church is growing fast and lines are unavoidable, station a volunteer near the line to create conversation and provide information.

**ONCE THEIR KIDS ARE CHECKED IN, THEY NEED  
TO KNOW WHERE TO GO AND WHAT AWAITS.**



# **IT CONTINUES WITH THE CLASSROOM**

There are two main things to consider in the classroom: 1) the space and 2) the teacher(s). Both need to appear be presentable, fun, clean, and safe.

Your church's style will determine the decor. Regardless of specifics, classrooms should be clutter-free to avoid confusion and concern. Seeing a cluttered room with potential safety hazards creates anxiety in the minds of parents. A clean, bright, and inviting space sends unconscious signals that this is a safe place.

All teachers over 18 years old should have a background check. This is a no brainer. It also needs to be communicated to parents. With all the recent scandal, parents are concerned, and rightfully so.

Do you know who else is concerned? Your insurance company. Utilizing teachers and classroom assistants without background checks (or fingerprint clearance cards) opens your church up to liability you most likely can't afford.

You give parents and yourself peace of mind by going the extra mile for safe spaces and teachers.

# IT ENDS WITH CONVERSATION

I guarantee your visitors with kids will ask their kids one or both of these questions after they pick them up from class:

- Did you have fun?
- What did you learn?

It's our job to make sure those kids can answer yes and something significant.

Your job doesn't end there. You should ask those same questions of the parents. If you set up your check-in process correctly, you should have the contact info for the parents. Why don't you create a workflow that includes following up to ask if the kids had fun and learned something valuable. This process does two very important things:

- It gives you great information on: a) where you can improve, and b) the progress of the child.
- It shows the parents that you care as much as they do about their child's well-being.

Caring for the same child is a bonding experience. Once parents know you've done everything you can to care for the safety and spiritual well-being of their kids, a relational bond will form that will keep them involved at your church.



**STEP**

**5**



## ***PROVIDE CONNECTION POINTS***

Just like we're moving beyond impressions toward experiences, we need to move beyond next steps toward connection points.

A next step signifies that a person will be on their own journey. A connection point insinuates that we're in it together.

It used to be that the only place to get good biblical and spiritual information and inspiration was at church. Then the internet happened and your visitors can access way more valuable content than you'll ever be able to produce. If all you're offering is next steps, they can take better ones somewhere else.

However, if your next steps lead to connection points, now you're onto something.

Your church needs a workflow or system that tracks where people are with the available connection points at your church. Then it assigns them to someone who will walk alongside them in their journey.

The difference? Here are some examples:

- Instead of telling your audience to “join a group,” you have someone invite an individual.
- Instead of asking people to give, you create a custom message to invite them to invest.
- Instead of posting a sign-up sheet for volunteers, you suggest a certain position based on what you already know about that person.

**THE POINT HERE IS: YOU NEED AN  
AUTOMATED, CONSISTENT WAY TO MAKE  
PERSONAL AND AUTHENTIC CONNECTIONS.**

When people know why they matter and where they fit, they're much more likely to get plugged in and stay connected.

**STEP**



***BE NICE***

Why the half step? Because you should be doing this already. So why include it? Because we all need a reminder.

Sometimes we take church so seriously that it starts to feel like a business, when it should feel like a family.

People are not products, and they are more than just a number.

We understand how stressful Sunday mornings can be. Leaders and volunteers have a lot on their minds, and it can be just too easy to process people like customers, instead of welcoming people like family.

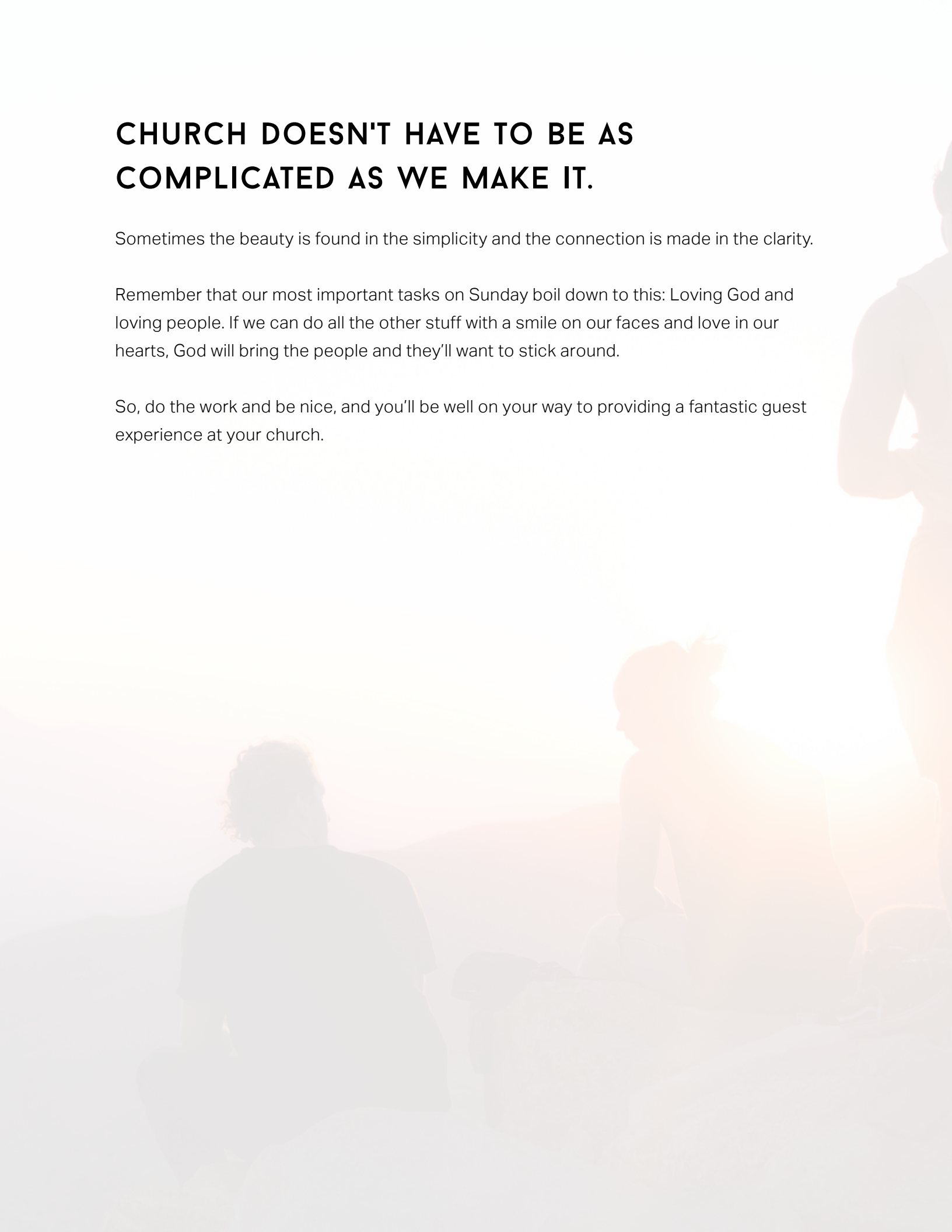
**BE NICE. TAKE TIME. MODEL HUMILITY. BE REAL.**

# CHURCH DOESN'T HAVE TO BE AS COMPLICATED AS WE MAKE IT.

Sometimes the beauty is found in the simplicity and the connection is made in the clarity.

Remember that our most important tasks on Sunday boil down to this: Loving God and loving people. If we can do all the other stuff with a smile on our faces and love in our hearts, God will bring the people and they'll want to stick around.

So, do the work and be nice, and you'll be well on your way to providing a fantastic guest experience at your church.





Throughout this guide, you have seen several ways that Realm helps churches reach new people and manage the life and operations of a church. We're excited to share more about our revolutionary ministry tool, Realm.

Realm provides solutions that will make your ministry and life way easier. It is cutting-edge church management software that combines administration, accounting, and community into one system. It also connects your entire church and personalizes each person's involvement in your ministry.

We'd encourage you to explore all that Realm makes possible by taking a demo, walking through a self-guided tour, or speaking with an associate today!



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