

7 Habits

of Highly Engaged Churches
in the ***Summer***



The Summer Problem

Why churches struggle with summer engagement.

Who doesn't love summer?

Great weather, opportunities for travel, long days, and short nights. Sounds amazing, right? (Okay, sure, it also often comes with mosquitoes and humidity, depending on where you call home.)

For church leaders, there's another distressing component of summer.

The dreaded summer slump.

Anyone who has served in church life for long knows that engagement drops during the summer months, at times drastically.

This guide will help you turn the page on the summer slump, stay steady during the weeks between Memorial Day and Labor Day, and even grow through that period.

Understanding the Summer Slump

Part of the charm of the summer season is that schedules are in flux. The kids are out of school, and families plan vacations.

The weather is nice, so people want to spend more time outside.

Often, churches take an engagement hit because of these fluctuations. For some churches (especially those in college towns), seasonal fluctuations in the community's population impact churches even more.

Many churches have historically noticed this lower engagement and planned accordingly, offering less programming. Building activities into the calendar that few people will attend makes no sense.

So, small groups take a break. Community ministry goes on the back burner. Expectations drop.

And that's a problem.

The Consequences of Spiritual Pause

When your church takes its foot off the accelerator, the consequences impact your church, individual congregants, and even the community you serve.

Your church loses valuable momentum that you may have garnered post-Easter. In some contexts, school lets out six or seven weeks after Easter. That means you have a few weeks to grab guests' attention before summer disrupts their schedules.

Congregants also lose momentum on any spiritual growth they've seen in recent months. With fewer opportunities to gather with other believers through small groups, church-wide events, and in ministry, relationships stall. And when those bonds weaken, some don't return to church in the fall.

But the most frustrating consequence of the summer slump happens in the community around you. When you step back, marriages don't get repaired, needs go unmet, and people aren't reached with the good news about Jesus.

Setting the Stage for Summer Engagement

But the good news is that your church doesn't have to accept that same tired script summer after summer. Just because engagement has dropped off in previous summers doesn't mean it has to this year.

The summer can become a catalyst for future growth that flows right into the fall. Imagine what an engaging summer can mean for your church. Allow your church to dream about a summer where involvement of all kinds (attendance, participation, giving, etc.) grows.

But to flip the script, you'll need a new strategy. You'll need to be proactive.

That's where this guide will help.

Building the habits that drive more profound, fulfilling church involvement is the key to a better summer for your church.

Habits like ...

» **Deepening prayer life:**

Transform the summer into a season of spiritual renewal.

» **Uniting across generations:**

Use summer's unique pace to strengthen inter-generational bonds within your church community.

» **Cultivating spiritual growth:**

Unlock the power of scripture this summer to deepen faith and keep your church family connected.

» **Delivering engaging sermons:**

This summer, captivate and inspire your congregation with sermons that speak to their lives.

» **Developing personal growth plans:**

Empower individuals with personalized spiritual growth plans that thrive in summer's flexibility.

» **Serving your community:**

Engage in meaningful summer service to build bridges with the community

» **Connecting through small groups:**

Create deep personal relationships by adapting small group activities to fit the season.

Sure, these habits are basic actions that most churches already take. Still, this guide will introduce them to summer-specific activities to further engage your church family.

You'll also note a "Leveraging Technology" section in each chapter that will give you an idea of how technology can significantly impact this particular aspect of church life.

Are you ready to dive in?

Deepening Prayer Life

Transform the summer into a season of spiritual renewal.

In the summer, we do all sorts of things—go to the ballpark, have picnics, catch fireflies, you name it. But few people think of it as a time of prayer.

But that doesn't have to be true. Summer can be the entrance into a beautiful time of prayer.

Here are four ideas to help your church do just that.

» **Lead a prayer walk.**

The summer offers the perfect time to build a regular cadence of prayer walking around your neighborhood and other strategic locations around your city. Prayer walking is pretty simple. It's about praying on-site for the people in places around you.

Plan a prayer walk a week. Start by prayer walking around your property. Pray about the different ministries that take place there. Pray for your weekend worship services. Then, walk around your neighborhood, ensuring you pray around your local school, community meeting places, and high-traffic places. Then, pray around other areas in your community where you'd like to see ministry start.

» **Hold a prayer and fasting retreat.**

Pick a weekend (or even just a day) during the summer for families to get away from their day-to-day demands to pray together. You can focus the prayer around a specific issue (church renewal, outreach, etc.) or make it a more general time for the congregation to spend more focused time in prayer.

Consider including some teaching on what the Bible says about prayer and providing insights into how people can build prayer more fully into the rhythms of their lives.

Make the retreat family-friendly by including programming for children and youth or encourage families to pray together.

» **Set up interactive prayer stations on your property.**

We tend to think of prayer as a time when we speak to God and listen to him, but it has the opportunity to engage all five senses he gave us. Interactive prayer stations around your property can help your congregants engage with God in new and creative ways.

For example, set up a station with an item from the community (the more unusual and culture-specific the item is, the better) where one of your missionaries serves. Encourage congregants to touch the item and use it to motivate their prayer. Include specific prayer requests from the missionary in the station.

You can also have a station with food smells where congregants can pray for food insecurity in your community. Again, provide specific requests on the topic with the station.

» Provide summer prayer journals.

At the beginning of the summer, pass out prayer journals complete with prompts that help people record their conversations with God. Spend some time teaching your church community how to use a prayer journal. (The book of Psalms is a great biblical guide.)

When you give people the journals, challenge them to do this for at least a month and see what they learn from it. Ideally, your congregants will build a new spiritual discipline in their lives after this experience.

Nothing has the potential to revolutionize our spiritual lives and the growth of the church collectively as prayer. The ideas above are a great way to take an important step forward in this area this summer.

Tech Touchpoint

Use text messages and/or emails to inform people of your church community's prayer requests.

Uniting Across Generations

Use summer's unique pace to strengthen intergenerational bonds within your church community.

Think back to your best memories of the summer. Those experiences likely included people of different generations. Whether those people were parents, children, grandparents, friends, or neighbors, those summer experiences you shared shaped who you are today.

That's why summer is a great time to invest in the intergenerational relationships that are often at the heart of the local church. The longer days and warmer weather provide many opportunities for intergenerational growth that can pay dividends long after the summer sunsets. Here are a few ideas to get you started.

» **Host intergenerational worship services.**

This may be the most straightforward idea to implement quickly. Remember, this is different from a youth service. You want to intentionally include people of various ages (not just youth) in the different elements of the service.

Start by mixing up your church's music team. If you have multiple people in your worship team (vocal and instrumental), include people of different ages. Try to have someone of a different age than typical give the sermon.

Most importantly, ask your congregants to invite people of different ages to the service. Ask grandparents to bring grandchildren and youth to invite their parents.

» **Promote family service projects.**

Serving together is a compelling way for families to grow closer. One way to promote this is to find the needs of elderly church members (or residents of a nearby nursing home) and ask families to volunteer a couple of hours of time to meet these needs together.

You can also ask local nonprofits for opportunities for your church's families to serve them. Many have many more needs than they can meet independently and depend upon volunteer help

» **Organize campfire story nights.**

Invite your church's good storytellers (look across generations for these people) to share some of their favorite stories over a campfire. Bring s'mores and maybe hot chocolate if it's not too hot at night in your area.

You could share Bible stories during these campfire experiences, but you could also mix in some fun family adventure stories—particularly ones that give young people a glimpse into the lives of your church's older members.

» **Start a family scripture memory challenge**

The Bible reminds us that memorizing scripture (or hiding God's Word in our hearts, as the Bible describes in Psalm 119:11) helps us grow in biblical faithfulness.

Assisting families in memorizing scripture together will not only bring them together around a common goal but also help them grow in their walk with Christ.

Challenge your church families to memorize a verse a week together. At the end of the summer, organize a family fun day for those families who successfully memorize all (or most) of the verses in the challenge. Make allowances for singles and those who attend church without all of their family members. Consider grouping them in their small groups or other groups.

» **Arrange a summer picnic.**

Nothing says summer quite like picnics. Pick a day (and a backup). Sunday afternoons after church tend to work well. The church can either provide the main dish and hold a potluck for the rest or ask people to bring in the main dish, too. Intentionally plan some games where people have to interact across generations. For example, make it a rule that you must partner with someone 25 years older or younger for any games requiring at least two people.

Building cross-generational relationships isn't easy—within families or among the congregation as a whole. Keep working on it even after the summer ends. Let the events above be a starting point for this important discipline.

Tech Touchpoint

Use text messages and/or emails to inform people of your church community's prayer requests.

Cultivating Spiritual Growth

Unlock the power of scripture this summer to deepen faith and keep your church family connected.

Discipleship is at the heart of every church's mission. Before he left, Jesus told us to "make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20).

Jesus gives us no vacation from this command, so helping people discover the treasures of God's Word must be a 12-month proposition.

So, how can your church more effectively engage people in spiritual growth this summer?

Here are three summer-specific ideas that will help people grow spiritually.

» **Provide a summer Bible reading plan.**

Of course, every season of the year is suitable for a reading plan, but summer may offer some unique advantages. Families often have more morning flexibility with school out-of-session in most areas of North America. Plus, a short summer reading plan can allow people to enter regular scripture study.

Consider giving your congregants a choice of several short reading plans. Maybe pick plans dealing with a few different books of the Bible or thematic plans on rest, stress, or relationships.

» **Host outdoor solitude retreats.**

In our noisy world, we all need more time to ourselves. Silence is often way too elusive. Help people get time alone by organizing a solitude retreat for church members.

You'll want to pick a day with nice weather and a location where people can gather at the beginning of the day and then scatter in a scenic location to have several hours alone. Provide a prayer journal for each participant with a few prayer and reflection prompts to help people organize their time alone with God. Give attendees a simple and flexible schedule.

» Encourage digital detoxes.

While digital devices have their place in spiritual development (such as Bible apps and digital reading plans), they can also distract us from growth. A digital detox—a commitment to abstaining from digital devices for a specified period of time—can help your congregation develop good digital habits.

Summer is the perfect time to unplug since convincing people to ditch their devices and enjoy the great outdoors is easier.

One way to do this is through a church-wide challenge. Ask everyone to pick one day during the summer to stay off of digital devices. You can recommend the scope of the detox (all digital devices, devices for personal use, mobile phones, etc.), or you can leave it up to the individual).

When congregants finish the challenge, give them a few tips about turning their detox into better habits moving forward.

This summer, seize the opportunity to help your congregants grow spiritually. Let these activities (and others) become a catalyst for future discipleship.

Tech Touchpoint

Create a spiritual disciple's habit tracker on your website and/or mobile app. Keep it simple and include disciplines like prayer, Bible study, giving, etc.

Delivering Engaging Sermons

This summer, Captivate and inspire your congregation with sermons that speak to their lives.

Developing sermons that speak to the specific issues of the summer isn't capitulating to the culture. It's speaking the language of those you want to reach.

Help your congregation see what the Bible says about some topics they regularly see during the summer. Here are a few sermon series ideas to get you started.

» **Summer Blockbusters.**

The summer is typically a time of great movies, with production companies often spending the most money on movies planned for a release between Memorial Day and Labor Day. Many of these movies have themes that engage directly with biblical themes.

Pick one of these movies (or a few of them) and build a sermon series around the themes. Use a title that leverages the movie title.

» **Great Adventures of the Bible.**

Summer is often a time when we think about and even plan to participate in some of the biggest adventures of our lives. Use this season as a backdrop to teach people about some of the great adventures of the Bible—from Abraham's journey in Genesis to the conquest narratives in Joshua to Paul's missionary journeys in Acts.

Use these stories to motivate your congregation to accept great adventures from God today.

» **Lessons from God's Creation.**

The Bible tells us that God tells us about himself through creation (Psalm 19:1, Romans 1:19-20, etc.) But what is he saying about himself? Explore what creation tells us about the character and work of God in a summer sermon series.

To leverage the summer fully, consider holding one of these worship services outside.

» **God's Summer Playlist: A Journey Through the Psalms**

The Psalms are some of the Bible's most beautiful and well-known passages. Because so many deal with nature, the summer gives you an excellent opportunity to engage them in a sermon series.

Pick about six Psalms to preach on (potentially choose Psalms of different genres to introduce your congregants to the full scope of the book).

Of course, these ideas are just the start. Be creative! Summer is a great time to try new ideas in your preaching and teaching ministry.

Tech Touchpoint

Include a place on your mobile app or mobile-responsive website where people can take notes on your sermons. Consider adding fill-in-the-blanks that your congregation can use as they follow along with the sermon.

Developing Personal Growth Plans

Empower individuals with personalized spiritual growth plans that thrive in summer's flexibility.

Every person in your church is unique—with a unique spiritual growth journey. That's why helping people grow isn't a one-size-fits-all proposition.

Personal growth plans can be a great way to help people grow in their unique ways. It provides congregants with an intentional and individualized strategy for growth.

What should be part of a personal growth plan?

Just like every spiritual growth plan is unique to the individual, it is also unique to the way each church defines a disciple. Since spiritual growth plans are designed to help people grow as disciples of Jesus, your church's definition of that disciple sets the agenda.

But a good outline for a personal growth plan, regardless of your definition of a disciple, looks something like this:

» **Key focus areas.**

List all the elements your church finds essential in a growing disciple of Jesus (such as a vibrant prayer life, involvement in church, generosity, etc.).

» **Current evaluation.**

Have a place where your congregants can rate themselves on a 1 to 5 or 1 to 10 scale in each characteristic.

» **Tools, resources, and strategies.**

For each of the above focus areas, provide some ways for people to grow in that part of their lives. It may be a list of books on the topic. It could be a Bible reading plan on a specific topic or book of the Bible, etc. Try to have strategies that cross a variety of learning styles (visual, auditory, reading/writing, and hands-on).

» **Schedule and structure.**

Provide a place where congregants can make progress commitments toward these goals. For example, if they read some books, encourage them to say how much they'll read daily or weekly. If they practice a skill (such as showing hospitality to strangers, prayer, etc.), ask them to commit to doing it a certain amount each week.

The Missing Link

But there's still a missing piece to a successful personal growth plan.

You can create the perfect plan and hand it to people who strongly desire to grow spiritually, and it can still fail. To succeed with these summer growth plans, everyone needs a partner or mentor to check on their progress. Include in your plan a place where people can write the name of a partner with whom they will meet regularly for encouragement and accountability.

Go the extra mile and actively help connect partners within your church family.

Tech Touchpoint

Include a place within your mobile app where congregants can keep up with their summer commitments. It can be as simple as just providing a checklist feature where participants can mark what they've done for the week and note what still needs to be done.

Reaching Out to the Community

Engage in meaningful summer service to build bridges with the community.

Nothing helps your church continue its momentum throughout the summer quite like serving your community unselfishly. First, the summer weather adds several great service projects to your possibilities. Service also tends to be infectious. When people are generous with their time, it gets people excited about what God is doing in your church.

If you've struggled to involve people in service during other times of the year, try the summer. You may be surprised at how much easier it is.

Here are a few specific projects that can help you leverage the summer for great ministry opportunities.

» **Start a summer tutoring program.**

Summer break can often set kids back on academic progress. A free tutoring program (with an emphasis on engaging families outside of your church) can provide the extra help children need as they prepare for their next year in school.

Of course, you'll need older teens and adults who like working with children to make this happen. Do a quick survey of your members to see who fits this description.

Then find out what ages and subjects they are adept at providing tutoring.

Send a quick flier to local schools to inform them about the tutoring opportunities at your church. Tutors who work with children must pass the same security standards as Sunday School teachers.

» **Provide cooling stations on hot days.**

No matter where you live in North America, summer will be warmer than the rest of the year. There will be a number of public events (such as parades, fairs, etc.) where people need to be out in the heat. If your church can provide a cooling station (including free water, sunscreen, shade, and some information on your church), you will surely be a hit.

» **Host a neighborhood block party.**

Be a blessing to the physical neighborhood around your church by celebrating the summer with them. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to this. Your church can host the whole party, or you can involve your neighbors in planning and implementing the party.

Consider whether your church will provide food for the party. Burgers and hotdogs are always a great option for summer parties. Choose some party or festival games. Assuming your neighborhood has many families of children, focus your attention on younger neighbors.

Most parents will bring their kids to the party even if no activities are aimed at them.

Make sure you have some mechanism for getting participants' contact information so you can follow up after the event.

These ideas are just the start. Gather some of your team and brainstorm different ways to meet your community's needs this summer. Focus your church's attention on one idea per month this summer.

Tech Touchpoint

Whenever you're planning a community outreach activity, communication among your team is critical. Use a mobile messaging app like Slack, WhatsApp, or GroupMe to stay connected with your team in the planning and on the day of the event.

Connecting Through Small Groups

Foster deep, personal connections this summer by
adapting small group activities to fit the season

Small groups struggle the most during the summer of all the areas of church life. Because groups are necessarily small (which is why they're called small groups!), they feel strongly when just a few people are out of town because of summer activities.

Yet there may be nothing more critical to summer momentum than healthy, ongoing small groups. Healthy small groups lead to a warmer church. When you build relationships in your small groups over the summer, that warmth impacts every area of your church.

Here are a few ideas to increase small group engagement over the summer.

» **Take it outdoors**

Just because it's summer doesn't mean you'll always have great weather, but it's a better bet than winter. Take advantage of your congregation's desire to spend time outdoors by planning outdoor Bible studies.

You can take it somewhere on your property or to a local park. The advantage to taking it off of your property is that you'll give bystanders a sneak peek at your studies in action.

Combine it with a picnic to maximize the outdoor fun. Make sure you advertise the outdoor Bible study so you have a backup in case a summer shower hits.

» **Leverage a summer theme.**

Summer includes many unique themes that are top of mind during this period, particularly rest, journeys, and even creation care.

All these themes have a firm basis in scripture and will be especially interesting during the summer. For example, a study on rest can look at the concept of the Sabbath (Genesis 2:2, Exodus 16:23-26, 20:8-11, Deuteronomy 5:12-15), Jesus' great promise of rest in Matthew 11:28-30, and the promise of a future Sabbath rest for the people of God in Hebrews 4:8-9.

» **Provide flexible, short-term study options**

Summer is a great time to mix up your study groups. Consider some short-term (six- or eight-week) options that your congregants can participate in during the summer and then return to their regular groups. Short-term summer options allow guests to get started in groups that are just forming, so they don't need to try to break into existing ones.

» **Incorporate a special ministry cycle for your groups, including fellowship and ministry.**

Try something new by encouraging your leaders to schedule regular service opportunities and fun throughout the season. For example, your groups can study one week, plan a special fellowship activity (particularly one that's outdoors) the next week, and then serve somewhere in the community in the third week. Then, start the cycle over again.

» **Involve entire families.**

Typically, summer provides families with children with a little additional flexibility. Family Bible studies include everyone in the families in the same groups (parents and children). Particularly for families with small children, include pen-and-paper activities related to the study that children can do. If possible, include some extra family activities (related to the theme of the study) to help keep the interest level up for younger participants.

These summer Bible study options can help you align your groups to the uniqueness of the summer season and build upon any momentum you've garnered in the first few months of the calendar year.

The Missing Link

Many of your congregants will be traveling during the summer. Encourage groups to use digital video platforms such as Zoom or Google Meet to include traveling members in group meeting times when possible.

Connecting Through Small Groups

Foster deep, personal connections this summer by adapting small group activities to fit the season

Stop stressing over how involved your church members will be this summer. Start making practical steps toward better summer engagement.

The ideas in this guide will get you started. Now, build upon them for your church's best summer yet!

Choosing the Right Ministry Partner

The know-how you need from experts you trust.

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We believe in YOU!


We're not just interested in satisfied customers. We see ourselves as your real ministry partner and will work with you to make disciples that will last for an eternity. We're excited to talk about your goals, create a plan together, and set you up with the software, service, and resources you need.

Let's Talk

We know the challenges of switching or implementing new technology and how that can be intimidating. But we also know the unbelievable changes that have happened within churches that have partnered with us for their ministry needs. Let's connect and see how we can assist you in the greatest thing you do - grow God's Kingdom.

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