

**WE
WANT
YOU
HERE**

The word 'YOU' is written in a bold, sans-serif font on a white, three-dimensional ribbon that appears to be draped across the text. The ribbon has a textured, lined appearance on its sides and ends in a small loop on the right side. The overall design is a classic recruitment slogan.

**WE
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YOU
HERE**

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To

You who honored our church with your visit.

We are glad you came.

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ABOUT THE BOOK

I get it. Many of you who read this will think, *I don't think this was the guy we heard preach last Sunday—was it?* No, you are not crazy. I am not the local church pastor in your community. But I am connected to the church you visited.

First, if you are a follower of Jesus, we are all connected. Local churches in Annapolis, East Africa, Australia, and Antarctica—we share a bond and common mission through the gospel. We are all connected through Christ.

Second, I lead an online community of pastors who care about you deeply. I create content to help pastors in many different ways, but some time ago, a particular topic stuck a chord. I learned that the pastors in our online community are very concerned about finding the most effective way to say to guests who visit their church (and those who they hope will visit their church in the future), “We want you here.” So I wrote this book as a way to help those of us who care about church guests.

WE WANT YOU HERE

I was in your shoes once. I know what it is like to join a new church community. I hope you will find help in the pages ahead. Because we *really* want you here.

Thom S. Rainer

CHAPTER 1



Thank you.

We know. Those two words can seem trivial. We say them so often we can take them for granted.

But we really do want to thank you for being a guest at our church. We do not take your visit lightly. You have given of your time and energy to come to our church.

So, thank you again. We really mean it.

You may have some questions about our church. You may have some questions about your experience when you visited.

We get it.

Anytime you go to a new place, there may be uncertainty, and there may be questions. Our staff and church leaders are available to help you. We want to be as transparent as possible. We want to tell you about our church. We want to hear from

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you. And we want to answer your questions. Please let us know how we can help.

We want you to know something else: We really want you here!

Okay, that may sound absurd on the surface. How can we really want you here unless we know you well? Let us share five key reasons and you may get a better idea of our excitement about your visit.

REASON #1: WE WANT YOU TO EXPERIENCE THE LOVE OF CHRIST.

We believe in Jesus Christ.

We believe he is the Savior of the world.

That is why we gather and worship at this church. Quite frankly, that is why we do what we do.

There are many good organizations out there. And many of them are doing a great job serving others and helping others. We are grateful for those organizations.

But churches are different. We do all we do because we love Christ. We know his love. We have experienced his love. We have given our lives to him.

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You may already be a Christian. That is great. We hope that you can continue to experience the love of Christ at this church. Serving and loving Christ was never meant to be a solo effort. It was meant to be shared with fellow believers.

Maybe you aren't a Christian. Or maybe you have questions or doubts about being a Christian. We will explore this matter further in chapters 5 and 7. But please understand you are welcome here regardless. We want you to experience the love of Christ.

It is transforming.

It is forgiving.

It is life-changing.

Perhaps this reason is the greatest reason we are glad you are here. We really hope you experience the love of Christ at our church.

Nothing could be more important.

REASON #2: WE WANT TO SERVE YOU.

Everyone has needs. Everyone has hurts at points in his or her life. Everyone has questions too.

We really love serving people and meeting needs. We would really love to serve you.

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What is your need? Do you have questions about marriage, children, and family? Have you experienced the pain of loss in recent months? Do you feel lonely at times?

We want to serve you.

You will find at our church a number of people who find it a great joy to serve others. Many of them may have walked in your shoes. Someone in this church had experiences amazingly close to yours.

You may feel like you don't want to bother us. Hear us clearly. We take great joy in serving others, in serving you. So please, don't hesitate to tell one of us how we can help you. Please let us know. Don't think for a moment you are alone. We are with you and for you.

But you may not be experiencing some tough moments at this point in your life. We know that life has peaks and valleys. You may not be experiencing those lower moments right now. Instead, you came to this church to see if it is a place where you can connect and where you can make a difference.

That is another reason we really want you here.

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REASON #3: WE WANT YOU TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

Frances Mason was her name. She lived to be almost ninety years old, and she made every day count. She loved her church. And she loved people.

Frances had this never-ending desire to make a difference for God. And she had two primary passions. First, she had the passion to pray. Rarely will you see someone so committed to prayer. Second, she had this crazy notion that God designed everyone to make a difference.

Okay, it's not such a crazy notion.

Frances knew that, in the heart of everyone, there is a desire to make a difference and to be different. That is how God designed us.

Yes, we want to serve you at our church, but we want you to make a difference as well. In chapter 6 we will talk more about this idea of making a difference.

Big adventures for God often begin with small steps. You came to our church for a reason. Perhaps God sent you here so you could make a difference.

You see, we are really glad you are here because you may be here to make a difference beyond any expectations you've ever had.

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REASON #4: WE WANT TO GET TO KNOW YOU.

There is really something special when people get to know one another. They learn about their families, their hopes, their dreams, their fears, and their hurts.

You have been a welcomed guest, and you brought your unique self to our church.

Thank you.

But we know there is so much more to learn about you. We know you have stories and insights that will make our congregation a better place. So we hope to get to know you.

Jim was a recent divorcee when he was a guest at church. He obviously was wounded and hurting. He never planned for his marriage to fall apart.

At first, he was hesitant to get involved in the church. He just wasn't sure he was ready to develop relationships at any level. But he got involved, and he started getting to know people. He developed relationships and friendships he never could have anticipated. He loved the people in the church.

But the love was not a one-way street. The people in the church began to know Jim better. And the more they knew about him, the more they liked him. No, Jim was not perfect. Neither were the others in the church. But the more they got to

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know each other, the more they appreciated each other. They accepted each other just as they were.

We have no doubt we could experience the same with you. We really do want to get to know you. And the more we know you, the more we know we would come to love and appreciate you.

And we think you might feel the same way about the people in our church.

REASON #5: WE LIKE YOU.

So, how can we like someone we don't know, or someone we don't know well (yet)? That's part of the beauty of this church. As we will explain later, we like you because we know God loves you. And because God loves you and me, we are able to connect and appreciate each other just as we are. None of us are the way we want to be.

We like you because we love people the way God loves them: unconditionally. And while we cannot come close to loving others as much as God loves them, we want to show that love as much as possible.

We heard the story of a guest who came to a church with a lot of questions and pain in her life. She did not know what to

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expect at the church, but any expectations she might have had were quickly met.

“I could tell from the beginning that the people in this church cared for one another,” she said. “But I could also tell they weren’t a cliquish group not wanting others. They made me feel so welcome. They acted like they really wanted me here.”

Her message is our message. We really do want you here. We really like you.

And we really mean it.

WELCOME TO OUR CHURCH

Many years ago, Linda walked into a church not knowing what to expect. There is much to this story, but we will make it brief.

The good news is that she loved the church. She got involved in the church. In fact, to this day, most of her best friends are in the church. She went from a skeptic to a believer and, ultimately, to a highly committed part of her church.

But it did not start that way.

She came to the church with a great amount of uncertainty. She was not even sure why she was visiting that first day.

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She also came with expectations that everyone in the church had it all together. She had this unrealistic view that Christians and church members have solved all their problems and don't make any mistakes.

Well, she was wrong. And it took her a while to finally accept that a church is a place for broken people, a place for people who don't have it all together, and a place where everyone is not always nice and happy all the time.

Linda finally came to the realization that church is not a place for perfect people, but a place where broken people come for healing.

Linda's story is our story. Our church is not perfect, far from it. We in the church are not perfect, far from it.

We want you to know you can come to our church just as you are; the rest of us in the church are no better than anyone else.

But we will talk more about this place of imperfect people in the next chapter.

For now, please hear it again: We want you here.

Thank you for taking time to share your life with us. We are here for you, to answer your questions, to pray with you, and just to let you know we care.

We hope the message is clear.

We really want you here.