

## COMMUNICATING IN A SEEKER-FRIENDLY CHURCH

Many modern sinners are turned off by traditional ways of presenting the Christian message. Those who build their congregations on cutting-edge church growth recommendations have learned to tailor their lessons so as to make them acceptable to those “seekers” of the world. Polls, focus groups, demographic studies and marketing studies have identified the vocabulary that is most effective in getting postmodern folks into church. The following annotated glossary is borrowed and highly modified from an article by Bob DeWaay entitled “**A User’s Guide to Seeker Sensitive Religious Terminology** (Critical Issues Commentary, Jan/Feb. 2000). While it is obviously a tongue in cheek parody, those familiar with the materials of our change agents will recognize there is a large amount of factual truth in it.

1. **Atonement.** Best not mentioned. Too technical and threatening to some. Implies God might be unhappy with them.
2. **Bible.** Fundamentalists tend to use the Bible in a threatening way that seekers do not appreciate. They do not wish to be preached to. If you must use the Bible, severely limit the amount of it you cite. Seekers prefer stories from the Bible. Doctrinal and controversial teaching should be avoided.
3. **Blood.** The idea of blood being required for forgiveness is offensive to postmodern seekers. It sounds primitive and barbaric. They get their feel of violence from movies and TV. Better just dwell on God’s love.
4. **Christ/Jesus.** Feel free to use these terms freely. Dwell on his love, mercy and forgiveness, but avoid talking about his commandments, condemnation and judgment. The latter are not pleasing to today’s seekers.
5. **Church.** Since many non-Christian have had bad experiences with church, better to use “God’s family,” “worship center” or other terms.
6. **Commandments.** Postmoderns do not like to be commanded. They prefer to be invited to try something.
7. **Cross.** Do not dwell on the necessity or the barbarity of Jesus’ death. Rather dwell on the love aspect . It makes seekers uncomfortable to think os such violence .
8. **Damnation.** This should not be discussed. It is upsetting to seekers of our age.
9. **Doctrine.** Don’t dwell on doctrine. It will drive folks away from church. Tell them stories. Talk about practical matters such as marriage, parenting and self-esteem.
10. **Evangelical.** This is recommended over “Lord’s Church,” “Church of Christ,” or “Bible-believing Church.” It includes most church folks and excludes few. Because it identifies us with larger Protestant church it gives us prestige. It is safe and popular.
11. **Evidence.** Postmoderns are not interested in evidence. They do not wish to chose between right and wrong, truth and error. They prefer lessons that make them feel good.
12. **Father.** Better to use “God.” Many postmodern women are offended when God is presented as male. A neutral term allows all to envision God as they wish.
13. **Fear of God.** This should not be used in teaching. Our generation does not like the concept. It seems very negative to them. It implies God might do something harsh or unpleasant to those who do not fear him.
14. **Fundamentalist.** A useful pejorative term to blacken conservatives who do not embrace the new approach to Christianity. It lumps them with Muslim Fundamentalist terrorists.
15. **Gospel.** May be used so long as the goodness aspect is stressed. Show how it fits with discovering ones potential and brings wealth and success to people.
16. **Hell.** This should not be used in teaching. It is frightening to sinners and modern church-goers.
17. **Holiness.** This turns off postmodern people. It interferes with their freedom of choice and produces guilt. It implies that those who have this trait are somehow better than those who do not.
18. **Judgment.** It is a mistake to dwell on eternal judgment. No postmodern wants to hear about such. Also today’s seekers dislike having to make judgments about moral and spiritual matters. They hate those who make such judgments about other folks’ conduct.
19. **Legalism.** This is a good word for bashing those who still insist on going by the Bible in all things. It connotes some defective or evil perversion of Christianity.
20. **Love.** This is the term you can never over use or wear out. Just don’t try to command seekers to love anyone or anything. Never preface the word with “don’t.” That postmoderns resent.
21. **Pharisee/Pharisaism.** Useful terms to smear traditionalists and those who refuse to conform to the demands of 21<sup>st</sup> century culture and the change movement.
22. **Reason.** Postmoderns don’t like to reason about things. They prefer to “feel” or follow their intuitions. Short stories and anecdotes are much more useful in appealing to them.

23. **Repentance.** This turns off most seekers, implying wrong-doing and guilt. It causes embarrassment and should be omitted.
24. **Reverence.** This is not well-received by postmoderns. Relevance is better. You could do well by speaking of joyful, fun, entertaining or exciting when describing worship.
25. **Sin.** This is a moral negative and that seekers view as judgmental. They view users of such words as “self-righteous.” Better to speak of mistakes, poor choices or slip-ups.
26. **Sinner.** This should be avoided as it interferes with a seeker’s view of his/her own self-worth and value.
27. **Truth.** Stress that each of us must decide if a thing is true; that God gives each of us an understanding of truth. Never try to limit truth to one book, such as the Bible. Remind folks that truth is not set in concrete. Stress new truths rather than old ones.
28. **Worship.** This is old fashioned and churchy. Better to speak of celebrating life, experiencing God’s presence or some similar warm feelings terms.

While such vocabulary may suit those engaged in building mega-churches based on a new gospel, for me and my house, we will serve Jehovah and speak the pure words of God (Zeph. 3:9) to all who are willing to hear them. JHW