

# EMPTY SEATS

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**Why Your Church Is Full of Planned Visits  
and Empty of People**

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## A NOTE BEFORE YOU READ

I did not write this book from a stage looking down. I wrote it from the floor.

There was a season in our church where we were doing everything right spiritually and everything right strategically, or so we thought. We were praying. We were preaching the Word without compromise. We were running ads, building our social presence, and putting real money behind reaching our city. And people were responding. They were filling out forms. They were saying yes.

But Sunday would come and the room would not match the pipeline.

I remember sitting with that tension and honestly asking God if I had missed something. Not in a faithless way. In a real way. The kind of question a pastor asks when he is standing between what he sees in the Spirit and what he sees in the natural. And what I saw in the natural was empty chairs.

What God showed me was not a problem with His calling. It was a problem with our infrastructure. We had built a front door but we had no hallway. People were saying yes and then walking into nothing. No system. No preparation. No bridge between their decision and their Sunday morning.

This book is the result of solving that problem. Not just thinking about it. Not just theorizing. Actually building it, testing it, measuring it, and watching it work at One Way Church in Suwanee, Georgia.

If you are a pastor between 35 and 50 with a church of 75 to 300 people and a vision that is bigger than your current attendance, this book was written for you. If you just launched and the attrition has been mind-boggling, this is for you. If you are scratching your head trying to figure out what is happening between your outreach and your Sunday service, keep reading.

With you,

**Pastor Jeremy Gibson**

Lead Pastor, One Way Church | Suwanee, Georgia

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## CHAPTER 01

# The Tuesday Morning Question

When the room is empty and the doubt is loud

There is a moment that most pastors have had and very few will talk about.

It usually happens on a Tuesday. Sunday is far enough behind you that the adrenaline has worn off, and far enough away that the preparation anxiety has not kicked in yet. It is quiet. You are sitting in your office or maybe at your kitchen table. And the weight of what you saw Sunday morning is sitting right there with you.

The seats were not full.

Not just empty in a launch-phase-we-are-still-growing kind of way. Empty in a way that does not match the activity. You ran the ads. You got the leads. You saw people fill out the form and say they were coming. And then Sunday came and the chairs told a different story.

**"Am I doing something wrong? Did God actually call me to this?  
Where are the people?"**

I know those questions. I have sat in that exact space. And I want to tell you something before we go any further in this book.

Those questions do not mean your faith is weak. They do not mean your calling is wrong. They do not mean God has abandoned your church. They mean you are a pastor who cares deeply about the people he was sent to reach, and the gap between what you see in the Spirit and what you see in the natural is creating very real pain.

That pain is actually holy. It means you have not gotten comfortable with empty seats. You have not adjusted your expectations downward. You have not made peace with a room that should be fuller.

Good. Do not let that go.

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## God wants His house full.

That is not a motivational statement. That is Scripture. In Luke 14 Jesus tells a parable about a man who throws a great banquet and sends his servant out with one instruction when the invited guests do not come. Go out into the roads and the country lanes and make people come in so that my house will be full.

Make people come in so that my house will be FULL. That is the heart of God for His church. Full. Not at capacity someday. Full. The impulse you have been feeling to fill those seats is not ambition. It is alignment with the heart of the Father.

So the question is not whether God wants your church to grow. He does. The question is why it is not. And I want to tell you what I discovered when I stopped asking the spiritual questions and started asking the operational ones.

**It was not an attraction problem. It was a systems problem.**

People were being attracted. They were clicking. They were responding. They were filling out forms and saying they would be there. The attraction was working. What was not working was everything that happened after the form was submitted.

There was nothing. No confirmation. No preparation. No bridge between their decision on a Wednesday night and their walk through the doors on Sunday morning. We had built a front door and then left them standing in the street for days with no map.

That is what this book is about.

# You Do Not Have an Ad Problem

Why more spend will not fix what the system broke

The first thing most pastors do when their church is not growing the way they expected is look at their marketing.

They think the ads are not working. They think the creative is not strong enough. They think the targeting is off or the budget is too low or the platform is wrong. So they hire someone to fix the ads. Or they spend more. Or they switch agencies. Or they try a new strategy.

And sometimes the leads go up. The form fills increase. The pipeline looks busier. And then Sunday comes and the same percentage of people show up as before. Because the problem was never the ads.

***"If people are responding to the ad but not showing up on Sunday, the ad did its job. Something else failed."***

Think about what an ad actually does. It creates awareness and generates interest. That is it. A good ad puts your church in front of someone who did not know you existed, and it creates enough curiosity or connection that they take a step. They click. They fill out a form. They say yes.

The ad did its job the moment they submitted that form. Everything after that is your system's responsibility. And if your system is nothing, then you are paying for leads that dissolve before they ever sit in a seat.

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## What the industry gets wrong

Most church growth services in this space measure their success by the number of leads they generate. They will show you how many people clicked your ad. How many filled out the form. How

many were added to the pipeline. They will present those numbers on a report and call it growth.

But here is the question none of them are asking: how many of those people actually showed up on Sunday?

I have looked at what other services report and what they do not report. The silence on attendance conversion is deafening. They will tell you everything except the one number that matters. Because the one number that matters would expose the gap in their system.

We built GrowChurch around the opposite philosophy. We do not measure leads. We measure Show-Up Percentage. How many people who said they were coming actually sat in a seat. That is the only number that tells you whether your system is working.



That gap is not small. It is not a rounding error. It is the difference between a church that is growing and a church that is spinning its wheels. And the thing that closes that gap is not better ads. It is a better system.

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## CHAPTER 03

# The Gap Nobody Talks About

What happens between the form and the seat

Picture this. It is a Thursday night. Someone in your city sees your ad while they are scrolling through their phone after putting the kids to bed.

Something about it stops them. Maybe it is the message. Maybe it is the location. Maybe God is stirring something in them that they have not been able to name yet. Whatever it is, they click. They go to your Plan Your Visit page. They fill out the form. They type in their name and their phone number and they tell you they are coming Sunday at 10 AM.

And then what?

In most churches, the answer is: nothing. The lead goes into a spreadsheet or a pipeline and sits there. Maybe someone sees it on Friday and sends a generic email. Maybe there is a text that goes out Saturday morning. Maybe nothing happens at all until after the service when the church realizes the person never showed up.

Meanwhile that person spent Thursday night through Sunday morning without a single touch that prepared them for what they were walking into. They do not know where to park. They do not know which door to use. They do not know what to do with their kids. They do not know how long the service runs or what to expect when they walk in. Life gets in the way on Saturday. Sunday morning they wake up a little later than planned. The logistics feel complicated. The friction wins. They stay home.

**The seat was never the problem. The days between the form and the chair were the problem.**

This is the gap. And it is entirely fixable.

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## What a system does in those days

When we built the Street to Seat System at One Way Church, we mapped every single friction point between the form submission and the Sunday morning experience. And then we built automated sequences that addressed each one.

The moment someone fills out the form, they get a personalized confirmation within 30 seconds. Not a batch email the next morning. Not a generic auto reply. A real text that uses their name and tells them exactly what service they are confirmed for.

Over the next several days they receive messages that build anticipation and remove confusion. Where to park. Which door to enter. What the kids check-in process looks like. How long the service runs. What to expect when they walk in. An arrive-early note the night before. A morning-of reminder on Sunday.

By the time Sunday morning arrives, that person is not wondering what they are walking into. They have been prepared. They feel expected. They feel welcome before they ever set foot in your building. And that feeling is what gets them out of bed.

We went from guessing who was coming to knowing who was coming. And we went from watching people not show up to tracking exactly why they did or did not. Show-Up Percentage became the number that told us everything.

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## CHAPTER 04

# Show-Up Percentage

The only number that tells you the truth

There is a metric that almost no church is tracking, and it is the most important number in your entire growth strategy.

It is not your social media reach. It is not your ad click-through rate. It is not your pipeline size or your lead count or your cost per form fill. Those numbers are all real but none of them tell you what you actually need to know.

The number you need to know is this: of every 10 people who said they were coming to your church, how many actually sat in a seat?

That is Show-Up Percentage. Attended divided by Planned Visits times one hundred. One number. Complete clarity.

$$\text{Attended} \div \text{Planned Visits} \times 100 = \text{Show-Up \%}$$

If you are running ads and have no system in place, your Show-Up Percentage is probably somewhere between 15 and 20 percent on a good week. That means for every 10 people who said they were coming, 8 stayed home.

Think about what that costs you. Not just in ad spend. In momentum. In faith. In the energy of your team. In your own spiritual and emotional reserves. You are celebrating pipeline activity while the real outcome is being swallowed by a gap you cannot see because you are not measuring it.

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## Why this number changes everything

When you start tracking Show-Up Percentage, everything shifts. You stop celebrating leads and start evaluating systems. You stop asking how many people saw the ad and start asking how many people sat in the chair. You stop measuring activity and start measuring outcomes.

And when you have a real system behind your outreach, that number moves. At One Way Church we built toward a 40 percent Show-Up target and we track it every single Sunday. Every week the number tells us something. It tells us if the system is working. It tells us if something needs to be adjusted. It tells us the truth.

Most pastors are making growth decisions based on feelings and anecdotes. A few people said the service was good. It felt like a decent Sunday. The offering was up. But feelings are not data and good vibes are not a growth strategy. Show-Up Percentage is data. And data moves churches forward.

**"Planned visits are not the win. Attendance is the win."**

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## CHAPTER 05

# What a System Actually Does

Removing friction before Sunday arrives

People do not not show up because they changed their mind about God. They do not show up because the friction of showing up for the first time at an unfamiliar place felt bigger than their motivation on that particular morning.

That is the real competition. Not other churches. Not other religions. Sunday morning friction. The not knowing where to park. The wondering what to wear. The trying to figure out where to take the kids. The not being sure what time to leave to arrive on time. The quiet background anxiety of walking into a room full of strangers who all seem to know each other.

Every one of those friction points has a solution. And a system delivers those solutions before the person ever has to ask.

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## The five friction points every first-time guest faces

### 01 Logistics

*"Where do I park? Which door do I use? What time should I arrive?"*

### 02 Kids

*"Where do my kids go? Who watches them? Is it safe? Will they be okay?"*

### 03 Expectations

*"How long is the service? What happens during worship? Will I feel awkward?"*

### 04 Belonging

*"Will anyone talk to me? Will I feel invisible? Will I feel like an outsider?"*

### 05 Commitment

*"If I go once, are they going to pressure me to come every week?"*

A system addresses all five of these before Sunday morning. Not through a single email blast. Through a timed, personalized sequence that drips the right information at the right moment in the

right tone.

Parking information goes out several days before so they can plan. Kids check-in details go specifically to families with children. Service length and what to expect goes out mid-week. An arrive-early encouragement goes out the night before. A warm same-day reminder goes out the morning of.

None of this requires your team to do anything manually. It runs automatically every week anchored to your service time. You set it up once and it works forever. No date updates. No manual sequences. No week where it accidentally does not go out.

That is what a system does. It removes the friction so that the only thing standing between that person and your church is their own choice. And when you remove the friction, more people choose to come.

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## CHAPTER 06

# The Three Churches

Which one are you and what does the fix look like

After working through this with churches across different contexts, we have found that most fall into one of three categories when it comes to where they are in their growth journey.

Not because every church is the same. They are not. But because the fundamental challenge of converting traffic into attendance shows up in recognizable patterns. Knowing which pattern you are in helps you know exactly where the work needs to happen.

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## The Established Church

You have been running services consistently. People are finding you organically or through your outreach efforts. Your pipeline has names in it. But the gap between your planned visits and your actual Sunday attendance is frustrating. You cannot figure out why people say yes and then do not show.

For you, the fix is the Street to Seat System. A complete automation between the form and the seat. Build it once. Run it every week. Watch your Show-Up Percentage climb.

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## The Church Planter

You are building something from the ground up. You have a vision, a calling, and a launch date. But you need people in the room before you ever open the doors for the first time. You need a launch team that is genuinely engaged, not just signed up. And you need your first Sunday to make a statement.

For you, the fix is a pre-launch interest campaign that builds your team and builds anticipation before the doors open. Then the full Street to Seat System kicks in on launch day and runs from there.

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## The Relational Church

You know that your church grows best through relationship. Your community is tight. Your people invite their friends. But you want to accelerate that relational growth through a more intentional strategy without losing the personal touch that makes your church who it is.

For you, a Coffee with the Pastor campaign creates highly targeted invitations for people in your community to connect with you personally. High involvement from you as the pastor. High trust from the community. And a relational pipeline that turns coffee conversations into Sunday attendance.

**Whichever church you are, the gap between your outreach and your attendance is closeable. The question is not whether a system can fix it. The question is whether you are ready to build one.**

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## CHAPTER 07

# What Happens Next

How to move from empty seats to a full room

I want to be honest with you about something before we close.

Reading this book will not fill your church. Understanding the problem is not the same as solving it. And knowing that a system exists is not the same as having one. Lots of pastors know they need a system. Very few have actually built one.

The difference between the churches that grow and the ones that stall is not knowledge. It is execution. It is the willingness to stop doing church growth by gut feel and build something that runs with or without you managing it every week.

We built GrowChurch so that you do not have to figure out the execution alone. We tested this system at One Way Church before we offered it to anyone else. We built it to run automatically, to measure what actually matters, and to remove every friction point between a click and a seat. And then we packaged it so that any church with a Facebook page and a vision for their city can run it.

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## What the system includes

- + A complete Street to Seat automation from form submission to Sunday morning
- + Facebook ad campaign management with an evergreen always-on approach
- + A2P compliant SMS sequences that prepare your guests before they arrive
- + Kids segmentation so families with children get specific preparation
- + Monthly Show-Up Percentage report for every church every month
- + Ad creative refresh on a regular cycle to maintain performance
- + Onboarding and training for your Follow-Up Owner
- + The entire system running on a dedicated platform we maintain

What your team does is simple. One person. Ten minutes after service. Mark who attended. That is the only ongoing requirement. The system handles everything else.

If you are ready to stop guessing and start measuring. If you are ready to build the bridge between your outreach and your Sunday morning. If you are ready to know your Show-Up Percentage and watch it move in the right direction. Then the next step is a 30-minute discovery call.

Not a sales call. A conversation. We figure out which program fits your church, what the system requires from your team, and what results you can realistically expect. You walk away with complete clarity before you ever make a decision.

**GrowChurch prepares people for Sunday before they ever walk in the door.**

Book your discovery call at:

[growchurchhq.com/apply](https://growchurchhq.com/apply)

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*The seats are waiting. The system is ready. The only thing left is the decision to build the bridge.*

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jeremy Gibson is the Lead Pastor of One Way Church in Suwanee, Georgia, and the founder of GrowChurch, a church growth infrastructure company built around the Street to Seat System.

He planted One Way Church with his wife Gabrielle and has led the church through the exact challenges described in this book. GrowChurch was built as a direct result of solving the systems problem at One Way Church and proving the solution before offering it to any other church.

Jeremy also leads Jeremy Gibson Ministries and Capacity Leadership, both focused on developing leaders and building the infrastructure that sustains long-term ministry impact.

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## CONNECT

**GrowChurch**

**[growchurchhq.com](http://growchurchhq.com)**

**One Way Church**

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