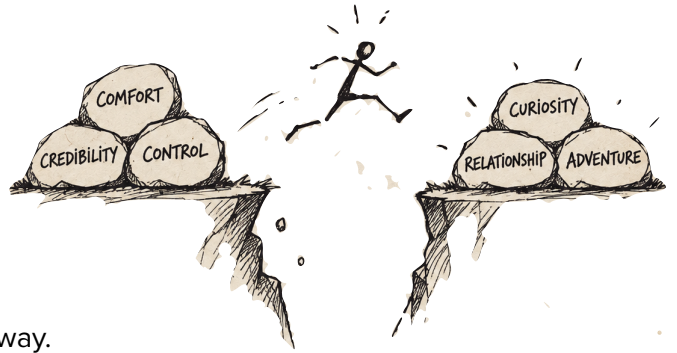


THE CHASM

The Distance Between Sunday Centricity and the Harvest is Smaller Than You Think



There is a chasm between where many churches are and where they could be. At least, it feels that way.

On one side is a familiar way of doing church: Sunday gatherings, sermons, worship services, programs, buildings, budgets, staff, volunteers, calendars, and events. These things are not inherently wrong. Many of them have served the Church faithfully for generations.

On the other side is the harvest. It is less predictable there. The people do not necessarily come to us. Relationships do not fit neatly into programs. Opportunities are difficult to schedule. The language is different. Success is harder to count. And perhaps most unsettling of all, we may not know what we are building before we begin.

For leaders who have spent years learning how to lead on one side of that chasm, Harvest Forward can appear to be asking them to jump into an entirely different world.

But what if the chasm is not nearly as wide as we imagine? What if the greatest distance between Sunday centricity and Harvest Forward is not structural?

What if it is a change in posture?

This Is Not a Criticism

It would be easy to criticize churches for becoming Sunday-centric. That is not the purpose of this conversation.

Most church leaders did not wake up one morning and decide to make Sunday the center of everything. They inherited systems, expectations, traditions, and definitions of successful ministry. They were trained to preach, lead gatherings, develop programs, organize volunteers, manage budgets, care for congregations, and grow churches. Then they became good at it.

They invested years, sometimes decades, developing the skills required to lead within that ecosystem. People trusted them. Churches depended upon them. Families depended upon the churches they led. Their lives became deeply intertwined with this way of understanding and practicing ministry.

So when someone begins talking about moving beyond Sunday centricity, resistance may not be stubbornness. It may be completely understandable. Because the movement touches three things every leader naturally values: comfort, credibility, and control.

These are not accusations. They are observations. And each one can make the chasm appear wider than it really is.

COMFORT

"I know how to do this."

There is something reassuring about familiarity. Sunday comes every seven days. We know how to prepare for it. We know how to plan a sermon, schedule musicians, recruit volunteers, organize children's ministry, create a calendar, and plan the next event. Even when the system is exhausting, it is familiar. And familiarity creates comfort.

The harvest is different. It does not operate according to our church calendar. Relationships develop at different speeds. Opportunities appear unexpectedly. Questions emerge that do not fit neatly into a sermon series. People may be interested in Jesus while having absolutely no interest in attending church. There is no template for every relationship because people are not programs.

Moving into the harvest therefore requires something different from knowing what to do. It requires curiosity.

COMFORT → CURIOSITY

Curiosity does not begin with an answer. It begins with questions. Who are these people? What matters to them? What are they experiencing? What are they afraid of? What are they hoping for? Where is trust already forming? Where are the tensions? Where are the possibilities? What might Jesus already be doing here?

Curiosity changes the leader from someone who arrives knowing what should happen into an *éclaireur* who is willing to explore. We begin paying attention. We notice things. We listen longer. We ask better questions. Slowly, things that were previously invisible begin to appear.

The first movement toward becoming Harvest Forward may therefore be surprisingly small. The first step isn't doing more. It's seeing differently.

CREDIBILITY

"People know I'm good at this."

Every ecosystem develops its own definition of credibility. The church is no exception. We recognize gifted communicators, experienced pastors, successful church planters, strong organizational leaders, theological education, growing congregations, large ministries, and innovative programs. Again, none of these things are inherently wrong.

But something interesting happens when we enter the harvest. Many of the things that establish credibility inside the church carry considerably less weight outside it. A title may not matter. A degree may not matter. The size of our church may not matter. Our ability to preach may not matter. Our position may not matter.

People in the harvest are often asking a very different set of questions. Do you see me? Are you interested in me? Are you listening? Can I trust you? Do you actually care about me, or am I becoming part of your ministry strategy?

In the harvest, credibility gives way to something far more powerful: relationship.

CREDIBILITY → RELATIONSHIP

Relationship cannot be manufactured, programmed, or rushed. It forms slowly through presence, consistency, curiosity, generosity, vulnerability, and trust.

This is why Harvest Forward refuses to see people as ministry projects. We do not build relationships so that we can eventually do ministry. Relationship is already sacred work. We express value. We form trust. And within that trust, Jesus has somewhere to become visible.

This changes the posture of leadership. Instead of asking, “How can we get these people into what we’re doing?” we begin asking, “How can we be present among the people Jesus has already placed around us?” Instead of trying to establish credibility before entering the harvest, we allow relationship to establish trust once we are there.

We move at the speed of trust.

CONTROL

“I know where this is going.”

This may be the most difficult part of the chasm because leadership usually requires direction. Leaders are expected to know where they are going. We create vision statements, strategic plans, ministry models, goals, metrics, timelines, and desired outcomes. We determine what we want to build and then develop a strategy for building it.

That same instinct often shapes church planting and ministry development. We decide to plant a church and then look for people who might attend it. We decide to launch a ministry and then look for people who might participate. We decide what the answer is and then enter the harvest carrying it.

Harvest Forward reverses the order.

We enter the harvest first.

That means we may not know what will emerge. And that can feel like losing control. But following Jesus was never supposed to be about controlling the outcome. It was always supposed to be an adventure.

CONTROL → ADVENTURE

Adventure does not mean recklessness. It does not mean abandoning wisdom, preparation, discernment, or leadership. Adventure means we are willing to follow Jesus without requiring Him to show us the entire map first. We know whom we are following even when we do not know exactly where He is leading.

This is one of the foundational convictions of Harvest Forward: We don't enter the harvest knowing what we are going to build. We enter attentive to Jesus, curious about people, and willing to discover what expression of His Kingdom might emerge among them.

What emerges could become a gathering, a dinner table, a community, a network of relationships, or a Kingdom Expression for which we do not yet have language. It could eventually become a church. But the church is no longer the predetermined outcome. It is one possible fruit of the harvest.

That is adventure.

THE CHASM WE IMAGINE

Perhaps we have been imagining the decision incorrectly. We picture two completely different worlds. On one side is the Sunday-centric church. On the other is Harvest Forward. Between them is a massive chasm.

Crossing that chasm appears to require abandoning everything we have built. Stop gathering on Sundays. Cancel programs. Dismantle ministries. Sell buildings. Change staffing. Rewrite budgets. Reorganize the entire church. If that is what leaders imagine when they hear "Harvest Forward," no wonder the chasm looks enormous.

But Harvest Forward is not asking churches to stop gathering on Sunday. It is asking us to stop assuming Sunday must be the center of everything.

Sunday can remain important without remaining central.

Gathering can continue. Preaching can continue. Worship can continue. Community can continue. But their relationship to the harvest begins to change. Instead of everything pointing toward Sunday, Sunday can begin pointing toward the harvest.

The gathered church can become a place where followers of Jesus learn to recognize the Kingdom, see the harvest, become curious about people, form relationships, experiment with possibilities, and join Jesus in ordinary life. The church does not disappear. Its people become increasingly present everywhere.

MAYBE THE CHASM IS A STEP

Once we see the chasm differently, the question changes. Instead of asking, “How do we transform our entire church from Sunday-centric to Harvest Forward?” we can ask, “What would one step toward the harvest look like?”

That is a very different question.

It does not require a five-year strategy, another ministry, a new program, or a complete organizational restructuring. It might begin by going somewhere and noticing people. Asking questions. Listening. Becoming curious. Building a relationship without needing it to become something. Paying attention to what Jesus might already be doing. Trying something small. Learning from what happens. Assessing, adjusting, and advancing.

Then taking another step.

The transition from Sunday centrality to Harvest Forward does not have to begin with organizational change. It can begin with a change of posture. And as that posture changes, structures can change naturally when and where they need to.

Suddenly, the chasm begins to shrink.

THREE CHANGES IN POSTURE

Perhaps becoming Harvest Forward begins with three surprisingly simple movements.

Comfort → Curiosity. We move from needing the familiar to becoming fascinated by what we have not yet discovered. We stop assuming we already understand the harvest and begin exploring it.

Credibility → Relationship. We move from needing people to recognize what we know to taking the time to know them. Our influence grows not because of the position we hold but because trust has formed between us.

Control → Adventure. We move from needing to determine the outcome to trusting Jesus enough to discover it. We bring wisdom and discernment with us, but we leave enough room for Jesus to surprise us.

None of these movements require abandoning the Church. They may help the Church rediscover the harvest.

And perhaps that is what has been hiding on the other side of the chasm all along. Not a new church model. Not another ministry strategy. Not another program.

An adventure.

TAKE THE FIRST STEP

Maybe there isn't a chasm.

Maybe we created one in our imagination because we assumed becoming Harvest Forward meant abandoning everything behind us and jumping into something completely unknown. But Harvest Forward does not require us to know what we are going to build. It does not require us to redesign the entire church before we begin. It does not require another program or another set of answers.

It simply requires enough curiosity to take the first step.

Move from comfort to curiosity. Move from credibility to relationship. Move from control to adventure.

Then enter the harvest attentive to Jesus, curious about people, and open to discovering what happens next.

