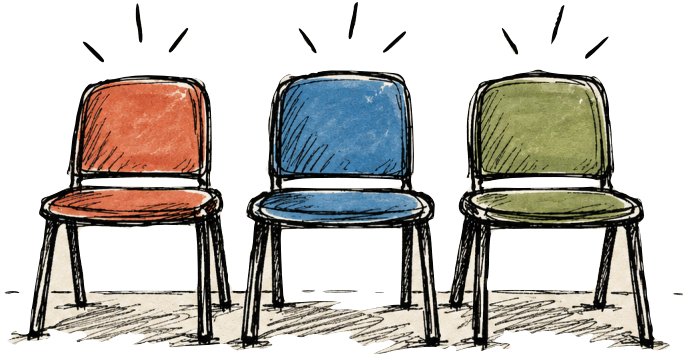


THREE CHAIRS

A Harvest Forward Exercise



Imagine three chairs sitting in front of you.

There is someone sitting in each one.

In the first chair is **Maria**.

Maria is 27. She works in a restaurant and rarely has Sundays off. She grew up around church but walked away years ago after some painful experiences. She is suspicious of organized religion, but she still has questions about God. She has several Christians in her life whom she likes and trusts. She would gladly have a conversation about faith over coffee.

There are things Maria doesn't talk about much.

She is barely keeping up with her bills. She sometimes sits in her car after a shift because she doesn't want to go home to an empty apartment. She hasn't spoken to her father in almost two years. She still prays occasionally, although she isn't sure who she is talking to. And there are things from her past she assumes would change the way Christians see her if they knew.

But Maria is funny. She remembers everyone's birthday at work. She is the person coworkers call when their car won't start at midnight. She loves her little sister fiercely. She has built a small community around herself without ever calling it one.

Maria isn't coming to your church.

In the second chair is **David**.

David is 43. He is divorced and shares custody of his two children. He has almost no church background. Most of what he knows about Christianity comes from social media, the news, and a few Christians he works with. He isn't hostile toward Christianity. It simply feels disconnected from his life.

David thinks deeply about being a good father, finding purpose in his work, and figuring out what kind of man he wants to become.

What most people don't know is how scared he is.

The divorce hurt him financially more than he admits. He worries constantly about money. On the weeks his kids are with their mother, the house gets painfully quiet. He drinks more on those nights than he tells anyone. He wonders whether his children will someday understand why the marriage ended. Some mornings he sits in the parking lot before work trying to convince himself that everything is going to be okay.

But David is also the dad who never misses his daughter's soccer game. He fixes things for his neighbors. He grills too much food because he knows somebody will eventually wander over. He has two coworkers he trusts enough to talk with about almost anything.

Almost anything.

David isn't coming to your church either.

In the third chair is **Jordan**.

Jordan is 20 and attends a local college. Church feels like another world with its own language, customs, music, expectations, and assumptions. Jordan cares deeply about friendships, justice, identity, belonging, and making a difference.

There is genuine spiritual curiosity there, but walking into a church building feels like crossing into a culture Jordan doesn't understand.

Jordan also carries questions that rarely make it into conversation.

There is enormous pressure to figure out who to become. Everyone else seems more confident about their future than Jordan feels. Social media makes that worse. There are nights when Jordan scrolls for hours, comparing everyone else's life to their own. There is a relationship Jordan knows isn't healthy but can't seem to leave. There are choices Jordan regrets and questions about identity, purpose, and God that feel too complicated to say out loud.

But Jordan is intensely loyal to friends. When someone is hurting, Jordan notices. Jordan volunteers for causes that matter, asks surprisingly deep questions at 1:00 in the morning, and has a genuine desire to make life better for other people.

Jordan isn't coming either.

Keep them sitting there.

Now choose one ministry in your church.

Don't start with the one you already know needs work. Choose something you value. Your children's ministry. Small groups. Men's ministry. Women's ministry. Student ministry. Worship ministry. Sunday morning. Whatever comes to mind.

Put that ministry in front of Maria, David, and Jordan.

Now ask three questions of yourself.

How does this ministry affect their lives?

Does this ministry equip someone who already knows them to reveal Jesus to them?

Does this ministry require them to come to us before we can serve them?

Sit with your answers for a moment.

It's easy to think about the harvest as something vague and faceless. A demographic. A percentage. A group of people somewhere beyond the walls of the church.

But put names, faces, stories, questions, schedules, disappointments, relationships, and real-life predicaments in those chairs, and the harvest becomes personal.

You aren't thinking about reaching "*people outside the church*" anymore.

You're thinking about *Maria*.

You're thinking about *David*.

You're thinking about *Jordan*.

And that changes the questions you ask about ministry.

The point of the exercise isn't to decide whether the ministry is good or bad. It may be doing exactly what it was created to do. It may be caring for people, forming disciples, building community, or equipping followers of Jesus.

But the three chairs help you see something else.

If this ministry requires Maria, David, and Jordan to enter your building, attend your gathering, understand your language, adapt to your culture, and participate in your programs before it has any effect on their lives, then the ministry is still designed primarily around the church rather than the harvest.

So look at the three chairs again.

Maria is still there.

David is still there.

Jordan is still there.

And they still aren't coming to your building.

Now ask one more question:

How could this ministry affect their lives even if they never enter the building?

Don't answer too quickly.

Get curious.

Imagine.

Talk about it with your team.

Then try something.

And when you gather to talk about another ministry, pull up the same three chairs.