Pastors (including myself) are typically not systems people. We tend to be big picture types who get bored with systems, processes, and the nuts-and-bolts of ministry. That’s why I appreciate Nelson Searcy; he is a fellow pastor who loves the church AND is highly gifted in systematic approaches to effective ministry. He is best known for the book *Fusion* that gives a detailed system for assimilation. Searcy’s approach in *Fusion* is so good, that when I’m coaching pastors on assimilation, I don’t reinvent the wheel. I give the pastor *Fusion* and supplement the book with Searcy’s online seminar; then the pastor can adapt Searcy’s system to his/her local church.

I recently read Searcy’s book “Ignite” which provides a systematic approach to evangelism. One common thread of churches that are plateaued or declining is they are not effective in evangelism. Jesus declared the purpose of the church is to “Go…and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19 ESV). If you want a telling measure of your church’s effectiveness in the Great Commission of evangelism, take your total annual church budget and divide it by the number of people baptized that year. Sadly for many churches, the math doesn’t work because division by zero is not possible.

I don’t know a pastor who doesn’t want to be effective in evangelism. We love people, and that is one of the reasons God called us into pastoral ministry. But how do we turn the desire of our hearts into an effective evangelism ministry? Searcy provides a tangible, systematic approach. Here are some of the highlights you will find in his book “Ignite”.

**Identifying four big-day Sundays**

A big-day is an all-out push toward a single Sunday for the purpose of breaking the next growth barrier and setting an attendance record with the goal of reaching as many people as possible for Jesus.

The four Sundays to target as big-days are:

1. Easter Sunday
   - Easter is an obvious day for evangelism. Many people will go to church on Easter who wouldn’t go any other time

2. A fall Sunday (one month after school begins)
   - Fall is one of the best times of the year to plan a big-day, but make sure to plan it one month after school so your big-day is not lost in the hustle and bustle of families preparing for the new school year.

3. A February Sunday
   - February is an effective time for a big-day because people are home during the month and it’s typically 5-8 weeks before Easter. Combining big-day in February with another at Easter is a good way to build incredible momentum.
4. A summer Sunday
   - A big-day in the summer will usually be a bit lower than the others, but it’s a great way to inject momentum into what’s usually a low time in the church calendar.

Once you put your big-days on the calendar, have your staff lead the church in a season of prayer and fasting for the first upcoming big-day. We talk a lot about prayer and less about fasting, but if we are really serious about being effective in evangelism, we must be serious about both; we have to cover the event in prayer and fast.

Ask God to help you set the goals for attendance for your upcoming big-day. When you bring God into the goal-setting process, you are exercising faith (which is a good thing) and don’t be surprised if God prompts you to set a God-sized goal. Setting goals gives your congregation momentum several ways. First, setting a goal builds anticipation. Searcy doesn’t recommend including the entire church in setting the goal. Set your goals with your staff; or in a smaller church, involve your leadership. Second, setting a goal pushes you to become more than you are right now. You’ll begin to know what you will have to do to prepare for the number of new people who will be there on your big-day.

The pastor’s leadership role is vital for effective evangelism. Without the pastor leading the charge to evangelism, churches naturally drift inward to focus their attention on meeting the needs of those who are already in the church to the detriment of the lost in their community. When it comes to the ministry of evangelism, the pastor must lead. Evangelism can’t be delegated to a person who has the gift of evangelism.

Here’s how the pastor leads his/her church in the ministry of evangelism:
  - Use your bully-pulpit
    - Every time you step in front of your church, you have the opportunity to influence them for Jesus. You have the opportunity to speak truth into their lives. Searcy’s church repeats the same challenge every Sunday, “If you found today’s message helpful, why not invite a friend next week?”
    - Tell your own evangelism stories. Share personal stories from when you shared your faith.
    - Testimonies. People love to hear stories of life-change and how the power of God transforms lives.
    - Teach an evangelism series. I know pastors who teach stewardship every year, why not schedule an evangelism series every year (or two)?
    - For your big-days, plan a preaching series that would be attractive to non-Christians.

Effective personal evangelism = Tools + Training + Timeliness

Searcy believes if you give people the tools they need, train them in how to use the tools, and give them a period of time in which they need to carry out their task, you will cause the evangelism temperature to soar in your church. How does this work?
1. Have people write down the names of unchurched friends on “invest and invite” cards
   - One side of the card has lines for people to write names of those they hope to reach for Christ
   - The other side says, “I will seek to invest in others who don’t have a personal relationship with Jesus and invite them to [the name of the church]”

2. Lead people to pray for the unchurched
   - Our hearts are drawn to those for whom we pray

3. Use invitation cards
   - Provide people with something they can hand to their friends when they invite them. The card should be creative, well-done, and provide all the key information needed.

When a connection card indicates a guest came through an invitation from a church member, the church sends a handwritten thank you note to the member with a Starbucks gift card; and the church suggests they take their friend out for coffee.

Searcy’s approach to evangelism is two-fold: the personal invitation to big-Sundays combined with mass promotion of big-Sundays and events. He gives a tutorial on how to use direct mail, newspaper and radio advertising, servant evangelism, and billboard advertising.

The evangelism system begins when an unchurched person is prompted by the Holy Spirit to attend your church and ends when that person follows Jesus, is baptized, and is growing in their faith. A key part of the process is the person saying “yes” to Jesus. The yes is the goal of all your efforts in evangelism. A yes means that a person moves from death in their sin to life in Christ. A yes triggers a celebration in heaven; all of heaven stops to celebrate the life of one who comes to faith in Christ. The single best way to encourage unbelievers to say yes to Jesus is to invite them to. I’m a strong proponent of giving the opportunity in every service for people to say yes to Jesus.

If you want to know more about this particular system of evangelism, I’d encourage you to read “Ignite”. You might not like every nut and bolt of Searcy’s system, and that’s okay; but to be effective in evangelism requires planning, goals, leadership, tools and training. A church cannot be effective in evangelism through good intentions alone. At the very least, Searcy’s book should get us thinking about what nuts and bolts we should use in our local church setting. Lost people are too precious to leave solely to our best intentions.