

PREFERRED CONTENT ONLINE CHURCH MODEL

Joshua Mervin + Joseph Barkley

Anyone, Anywhere, Anytime.

Summary:

The Preferred Content Model is designed to give the target audience the ability to make decisions that best suit their spiritual needs, delivered in a way that they prefer, in a time frame that is convenient for the audience. Current church models require their target audiences and customers to come to them, at a predetermined time frame, without choice of topic, resulting in the church creating experiences to serve the lowest common denominator in an effort to garnish higher attendance.

The Preferred Content Model will effectively revolutionize the idea of church by giving the target audience what they want, when they want it, and through the medium they prefer. By limiting how many resources go into a limited time frame on a Sunday morning or weekend, we effectively open up significant time, energy, and resources to produce additional media to be consumed by the consumer, resulting in higher reach to new target audiences. In order to achieve this, limiting how many in-person gatherings to a monthly rotation will allow resources to be utilized creating online content, thus increasing outreach and in-home groups, who will be the new epicenter of the church community and encouraged to watch the service together, effectively acting as a weekly small group and weekly church service. This will be a return to the original Acts church model of smaller communities that are interconnected by a common cause and leadership structure.

In-person gatherings will be heavily experience driven, take place on the first Sunday of every month at a music venue, with incentives to attend by offering exclusive messages, guest speakers, or by offering the first message in a series live. When critical mass is achieved in an area or locations, additional in person gatherings can be added and the decision to invest in a physical location could be made.

Content will be crafted for YouTube leveraging the algorithm to increase awareness of the church and then encouraged to join or start small groups all over the world with resources and support.

PRIMARY CONTENT (Message):

The Preferred Content Model is rooted in the concept that we provide multiple monthly message topics online via YouTube that are directly related to current problems that need to be addressed in our target audience's lives; for example, messages related to anxiety, relationships, Bible deep dives, racial injustice, and money management. The audience will be given new options monthly to choose what message series they want to watch with the ability to binge the entire series from the comfort of their home if that is their preference.

New messages will be added quarterly or monthly as resources allow. Providing as much content as possible will increase the audience experience and increase YouTube SEO outreach. Messages will not have any additional segments attached so that sharing videos is as easy as possible and titled appropriately with trending keyword search phrases for maximum exposure on YouTube, i.e., How to Fix My Marriage, 7 Ways to Save Your Marriage, 5 Secrets to Love. More importantly, it will gain higher priority on YouTube SEO by creating higher watch times for each video, increasing video suggestion to potential new subscribers, allowing us to exponentially grow our impressions.

Delivery of messages for online-only viewers will be via YouTube, but will be presented on a web page "marketplace" with trailers describing the content as well as promotions via social media and email marketing. The individual will then receive additional recommended resources based on the message they've chosen, including small group curriculum options, deeper dive reading materials, various inspirational swag, like journals or wristbands, and a follow-up invite to another series that is available. Each series will incentivize home groups to become church communities and watch together weekly, replacing large in-person gatherings except for once a month.

In order to increase demand and incentive for home groups, new messages would only be available to home groups BEFORE they are made public on the YouTube page. Home groups will be given a private link that they can access and watch the video via YouTube. This link will be emailed out to all group leaders in advance. The following month the message would become public on the YouTube page to all viewers in a playlist of message-only videos. Music will be on a separate related channel to allow for higher SEO and video suggestions.

Monthly message options should increase as resources and availability increases. To begin, single-series options are acceptable if needed, but should be avoided UNLESS

the content is for attracting new subscribers for example: “Does Hitler Go To Heaven?”. Special guest speakers from other churches and organizations should be approached for collaborations on specific topics, but avoid churches that are within 20 miles of an in-person gathering location. Once channel authority is achieved, various churches and organizations can be required to pay to have their content on our channels in order to increase their chances of people within their church location visiting their campus and integrating with their church via the exposure to their speaker. Effectively becoming the “Netflix of Christianity” and the dominant medium for religious self-help/how-to videos, and information given in a format exclusively for YouTube.

Within every message, approximately seven to ten minutes in, a short 15-30 second “commercial” break will be inserted, asking the viewer to like, comment, and subscribe if they find this content valuable, encouragement of home groups and giving, and a specific request for people to comment below in the comment section in response to a relevant question regarding the topic. The question should be controversial or interesting. A quick invite for new viewers to receive a free gift would be plugged by going to the official website.

Message content should be divided and balanced into two mindsets: subscription focus and engagement focus. Subscription is to attract new viewers on YouTube using keywords and content. Engagement should be deep dives for the loyal viewer to actively engage them with interesting content that is not a surface-level YouTube video. By offering multiple choices, you solve the balancing issue of gaining new viewers and discipling viewers effectively.

SUPPORTING CONTENT AND ASSETS (Music + Hosting + Deep Dives)

Frequency of music and hosting assets would be determined by resources. Recommended music distribution is two to four individual songs per month to be released weekly and shot in music video format. Guest artists and other church music groups not within 10 miles of an in-person gathering will be regularly recruited to debut their content on the network, increasing quality content and frequency of content. All content would need to meet strict quality requirements.

Hosting frequency would be done in an informal setting, like a morning show. Two dynamic hosts will have specific talking points on internal events supported by comedy or special guests for upcoming series. Hosting should be no longer than five to seven minutes, to be posted on YouTube on Sundays and promoted via social media on Mondays. Hosting will be archived after a period of time on YouTube for higher SEO once the current events are irrelevant.

Additional supporting assets will be instituted as resources increase. Podcasts, videocasts, YouTube shows, morning shows, and panel interviews are some of the examples of potential expansion. All would be for the purpose of scaling views on YouTube.

Special deep dive assets into a popular subject should be released periodically. This would be longer content (up to an hour) that goes deep into a subject to reach viewers searching for an in-depth video on a subject and create excitement for special videos to be reviewed by home groups.

SECONDARY CONTENT // In-Person Gatherings (Weekend Experience):

In-person gatherings would be focused on delivering a high-quality experience centered around worship, community, and the very first message of the series delivered live. With the focus on creating high-quality experiences, communion, well-designed prayer moments, and comedy, other experience-driven segments would be used regularly. Mission opportunities should be leveraged heavily. The in-person gatherings should be very visitor friendly and serve as a front door for new local attendees and experience-driven people to connect with the church. After the gathering, community opportunities should be regularly leveraged, like picnics, BBQs, games, beer garden, etc., to allow community members to connect. If possible, the in-person gathering should have facilities that are heavily catered to creating a quality live-concert experience that parallels modern music venues. The entire experience should feel strategically like attending a secular event in order to create an experience that a new attendee can feel comfortable with due to already regularly experiencing similar events, increasing trust from established brand ambassadors, thereby encouraging the invitation of new attendees.

Children's programming should follow the same experience-driven design, centered around games and activities that encourage children to want to return and bring their parents again. Discipleship and growth will occur in home groups during the week. (*See Home Groups below for more information.*)

*Potentially, every second in-person gathering monthly could be a Next Gen in-person gathering designed specifically for youth ages 8th grade and up. Using your top teams and adults to create an experience designed for youth will allow opportunities to reach kids in a pivotal age group. Studies show that a person is far more likely to become a Christian if exposed early in life.

*Frequency of in-person gatherings should be determined by availability of resources and staff to create online content AND create high quality in-person experiences.

*In-person messages could also have their own exclusive series to increase demand based on margin of labor. A series such as At the Movies, leveraging clips of movies to teach a message from popular movies, could be regularly instituted.

As the model scales, multiple in-person gatherings can occur at the same time in different locations when critical mass is achieved.

Conferences will be placed strategically throughout the year and only available in person to increase demand and be heavily experience driven. No in-person gatherings will be livestreamed or recorded in order to create demand.

HOME GROUPS AND DISCIPLESHIP (Small Groups)

With the in-person gathering focus being on experience, an increased importance of in-home small group attendance will have to be paramount to all other programs and be our primary promotion year-round. The online message viewer has the opportunity to watch alone, but should be encouraged to join a homegroup or start their own. The home group that watches their selected message series together would use the message as their primary curriculum source topic of discussion. The small group director would then create additional supporting curriculum based on the message topic and study guide. The home group can meet at any time of their choosing, not just limited to Sunday morning live streams. This will allow higher attendance and create flexibility for the group to meet more frequently.

*Optional: To encourage more home group leaders, \$50 per week could be paid or reimbursed to the team leader who hosts 10+ each week. Proven by a weekly photograph to be given to the home groups director. Revenue should even out over time as regular watchers engage in regular tithing, resulting in a \$2 customer acquisition cost per week. Annual cost per person: \$104. Any additional money given over \$104 would be profit revenue annually.

Home groups should be equipped with a monthly box of strategic assets for the available messages. Worksheets for the audience to fill out while watching the message, exclusive merch that can only be received if in a home group and not watching online, and bonus materials or messages that are exclusive only to home groups will increase demand and incentive to join.

Kids and Youth groups will be available weekly for in-person home groups divided by age. Once per month or per quarter all kids in 8th-college would gather in person together for a large experience-driven event that they can invite their friends to. College level and above will predominantly run the service and mentor younger ages, creating a clear bridge for each age to effectively transition to the next age group and allow college-level people an opportunity to NOT leave the church but integrate effectively. Studies show that most college-aged people will leave the church once they enter college because they have little connection to the adult services.

As critical mass accumulates in various communities around the world, in-home groups are formed, and then additional in-person gatherings (campuses) would be created for those specific communities. All in-home groups would essentially be mini churches, their group leaders serving as pastors in their own homes, acting as its own campus. Once an in-home group grows too large, several people would be selected to split off and create a new home group supported by the same resources.

As communities increase in number around the world and as resources allow, senior pastors and/or worship teams would travel periodically to in-person gatherings to those locations, creating higher demand for in-person gatherings and incentivizing people to attend in those areas.

All video content will be created in English due to its frequent use around the world. Curriculum, supporting assets, and other promotional materials could be created in native languages.

All home groups would be encouraged to quarterly serve together at a local initiative project in their area, such as a homeless shelter or other community-based programs, to increase discipleship and make a difference in the community.

All existing men and women's groups/ministries would be redefined as a specialty in home groups designed for men or women. Individual curriculum can still occur, but groups would be encouraged to either create their own approved content or have special message video content created for them. Seasonally or year-round these groups can launch around that message content that is being offered, allowing their brand to have exposure on our YouTube platform, thereby increasing potential new Unravel groups around the world.

MONETIZATION: Special weekend playlist assets would also periodically include monetization videos which will feature ads; for example, funny comedic videos on

cultural topics, music video episodes, information videos, or “how to” self-help videos such as How to Be Spiritually Healthy or Top 5 Ways to Get Your Prayers Answered.

Once channel authority is reached on YouTube, outside organizations and artists could pay to have their content on the channel for brand exposure. Ads would be allowed on all past messages and content to increase revenue but not instituted on new series.

MERCHANDISE: In order to help with revenue, merchandise such as shirts, hats, bags, and journals will be presented below every video within YouTube that a customer may purchase. Merch should relate to the message topic, i.e., a message series about anxiety would have attached an ongoing sale of a wristband or shirt saying “Anxious for Nothing” or officially branded merch. As videos gain more views, the merch sales will increase, thereby increasing discipleship with strategic resources to remind the consumers of the message. YouTube requires 10k subscribers for this feature to be available.

YEARLY MANDATORY SERIES:

Once a year, one message will be provided as the church together goes through a money management series, followed up with high quality small groups or money management programs like Financial Peace University. The message should be strategically geared towards helping people use God’s model of money management and create opportunities for new believers to begin unlocking the benefits of tithing.

*Time of year depends on geography and culture of location. I would recommend summer as the primary time to do a mandatory money management series due to this season not having high numbers of new attenders or viewers.

**Other mandatory series can be strategically implemented, like a community missions message with call to action for a mission project, for example, an all-church message on fighting sex trafficking.

PREVIOUSLY USED MESSAGES:

Previously used messages will remain on YouTube after its debut month, but be moved to its own series playlist for rewatching and SEO. Potential customers who are searching for specific topics, like “how to fix my marriage,” would be exposed to the network and invited to participate in a home group, monthly in-person gathering, and binge watch other relevant content.

As content continues to be created, past content will have optimized titles, keywords, and hashtags to allow video views to grow over time (snooze while they view)

resulting in very high views and further promotion. Underperforming videos will be removed.

MESSAGE PRODUCT DESIGN:

The message should be in an episode format with a maximum length of 21 minutes to mirror traditional primetime sitcom length the audience is already familiar and acclimated to. This also helps with SEO and watch times, thereby increasing reach. The message should feel and look like a YouTube episode: fast paced, lots of graphic visuals, and NO engaging 30-second series bumper up front. The goal is to get to the content as quickly as possible.

Series should be no longer than five episodes. Studies show the longer a series goes, the less watched it is.

VOLUNTEER:

Volunteer opportunities would be centered around film production, group leaders, children and youth leaders, and in-person experience gatherings. Some volunteers can be offsite completely and be a part of editing, writing, social media content creation, and other creative possibilities. In-home roles can be created for volunteer opportunities for the home group.

FILM STUDIO LOCATION:

In order to film a high frequency of content, a central location with a moderate film studio space and offices will be necessary at some point. A sound studio would be beneficial to capture quality music for videos, but is not necessary. The primary focus will be around the message. As resources increase, standing studios for projects like a weekly morning show, video cast show, or other ideas could be created.

BAPTISMS:

Baptisms would be available quarterly at a predetermined location. Interest and signups would be done online or at the in-person gathering.

NEW VIEWERS/ATTENDEES:

In the middle of the message, during the quick “commercial” and at the end of every message episode, the audience would be encouraged to receive a free gift if they’re new by going to the website homepage. Here information will be exchanged and follow-up will be strategically about getting people into an in-home group or volunteering if within a reasonable area. Viewers are already acclimated to this for all YouTube videos.

MARKETING:

Primary marketing strategies will be centered around YouTube SEO manipulation and keyword research for titles and subjects that the audience wants to view. All content will be designed specifically for higher SEO and video suggestions within YouTube to increase views and create channel authority. Once channel authority is established, our content will be the most competitive content within our industry and exponentially grow our impressions. This will be achieved by creating keyword titles, NOT series titles, of specific concepts or problems that our target market is searching for. We will be effectively *seducing and hijacking the YouTube algorithm as best as we can and repurposing it for the church's mission.*

The target audience for all our content will be **18-34-year-olds**, who disproportionately use YouTube (two billion monthly) as their primary media, dwarfing any primetime TV network. As this audience ages, we will have the platform and trust built up within YouTube to keep them as consumers and create future opportunities for them to engage in our content. With consistent high-quality content continuously being posted and effective marketing, we should be able to dominate our market area within five years (depending on frequency of posting). By posting multiple message videos each month, we increase our posting frequency from 52 videos per year to 104-208, at the least doubling our velocity toward channel authority.

The primary concern of each message content should be the title and message that relates to what our demographic is searching for on YouTube and Google.

All marketing dollars will be allocated to YouTube marketing exclusively, focusing on video suggestions in the early startup stages over video ads. If our content is relevant and of a high quality, organic growth will be exponential over the years.

As resources continue to grow, video ads to be played before the content of other channels can be implemented and marketed as "I hate church, church is irrelevant, and that's why we created a new kind of church platform that's designed for you and your problems the way that YOU want it without all the loopholes and Christian culture attached."

Strategically collaborating with other channels, churches, and nonprofits to do message and supporting asset content will expose our brand to other audiences. Inviting others to do content series will not only free up resource stress on the organization, but also position us to have more impressions on their existing base. Authors and other high-name-value speakers will create more momentum. The more quality content we post, the faster we will achieve channel authority.

We will ask various organizations to create backlinks to the network YouTube or market page. These are essentially a link to the pages where the audience can find our content. Backlinks act as votes for your website and create higher organic search engine rankings. The more backlinks we have, the more visible our content will be when people are searching. We will need to position itself not just as a church, but as a network that helps Christians and non-Christians all over the world.

Once we have identified key performance indicators (KPI), like organically high-performing video assets, we will spend marketing dollars to promote those specific high-performing videos and create even more impressions. Our primary KPI goal will be viewer growth and subscriptions via YouTube. Our secondary KPI will be engagement into home groups and volunteering.

We will position ourselves to be in the “how to” category/industry for all spiritual questions online, the primary search query in YouTube and Google searches. By solving our customers' problems, we will gain trust and create brand ambassadors.

We will function and operate on a marketing level as a YouTube channel that happens to have in-person gathering options. Once customer loyalty and trust is established, internal marketing will pivot to engagement and encouragement to join a homegroup. Once we've gained enough market share and growth, we will pivot to a larger marketing plan that is no longer just a YouTube channel, but as a lifestyle brand.

A series of focused Google Ad and TikTok marketing campaigns have demonstrated an increase of 1000 new subscribers per \$8k spend on marketing. **See detailed Online Marketing Plan in separate document.**

As revenue increases and organic YouTube growth has occurred, marketing dollars will be reallocated towards various digital marketing channels, including social media, Google ads, etc.

CONCLUSION:

This is a decentralized model to respond to the rapid change in culture surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic. Behaviors have changed forever. The church must adapt or could fade into ineffective obscurity. The Preferred Content Model is new and unique enough to inspire interest, buzz, and curiosity if we are first to market and its strength is centered around the “customer” and their needs and desires. With consistent discipline and quality YouTube content, this model in the following years would allow the network to be the dominant medium of Christian communication and thought on YouTube throughout the world.

This model is essentially returning back to the original model of the early Christian church, built around home groups, but with modern technology we are able to create well-equipped mini churches. The growth and exposure of a popular and successful YouTube channel will allow opportunities, advantages, and reach that other church models will not have, including but not limited to: relational equity of curious de-churched viewers by solving their problems directly in the comfort of their homes, unlimited scalability, budget relief from the release of costly campus mortgages and operational costs, and increased access to content the way the customer wants it at the time they want.

The Preferred Content Model is truly a church model for the people and their needs, not a church model for the established church and its needs. It is a return to the original Acts church philosophy. With relevant, quality content, we will be able to reach those that are far from God in ways we haven't been able to in the past. If you want to reach the people who nobody is reaching, you have to do the things that nobody is doing.

Flow Chart below

