

Stadia Pre-Conference Session 1

How Do You Start a Church That Reaches the Lost?

Speakers

Tim Celek (Director of Post-Launch Services, Stadia)
Josh Abernathy (Lead Pastor, City Church in Griffin, GA)

Session Overview

This session explored the heart of church planting with a laser focus on reaching lost people—not just building another church service. Tim Celek and Josh Abernathy challenged attendees to reframe their thinking around the Great Commission, prioritize personal relationships with the unchurched, and build churches that function more like rescue societies than yacht clubs. Their message was both a wake-up call and a roadmap for leaders who want to start churches that truly make a difference in their cities.

Key Takeaways

- **Start with a personal burden.**

If you don't personally care about lost people, your church won't either. Before launching programs or services, examine your own life: Are you in regular relationship with people far from God?

- **A church is not a service—it's a rescue mission.**

Avoid the trap of simply launching a Sunday gathering. Plant a church that mobilizes people to seek and save the lost.

- **Don't build a yacht club.**

Churches can drift from rescue societies into comfortable communities. Stay focused on those not yet reached.

- **Do a 'lostness' audit of your relationships.**

Use a five-category scale (antagonist, disinterested, searching, believer, follower) to identify people in your life. Who are you actually doing life with?

- **Be a student of your city.**



Josh met with 100 local influencers and asked four questions to learn the true needs of his city. This posture of humility opened doors for impactful outreach and long-term trust.

- **Simple presence matters.**

The City Church ice cream truck distributed over 90,000 free treats—not to recruit, but to love. Over half their baptisms started with those community interactions.

- **Clarity on expectations creates culture.**

Teach your church: if you're a follower of Jesus, your preferences matter least. You're here to serve, give, and reach others.

Notable Quotes

"The church is not a freaking yacht club." – Tim Celek

"Don't expect your church to love lost people if your dinner table doesn't reflect it." – Josh Abernathy

"Outreach is not recruitment—it's awareness." – Josh Abernathy

Next Steps with Stadia:

- Learn how Stadia can help you start thriving, growing, multiplying churches: stadia.org
- Have a vision for multiplication but lack a strategy or services? Join a Stadia Vision Trip to see our work up close: stadia.org/visiontrips
- Exploring or discerning a call to start a new church? Learn more about how we can help: stadia.org/discovery

