

stuff you wish they taught in seminary



5 Lessons from Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge for Your Church

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This summer, both [Disneyland Resort](#) in Anaheim, California and [Walt Disney World](#) in Orlando, Florida are launching massive new “lands” based on the Star Wars franchise.

[Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge](#) is the largest investment the Disney corporation has made in its North American parks in long time. Not only that, but it's the largest land expansion to any theme park ever made.

The Star Wars development is massive in size (encompassing over 14 acres) and colossal in price (rumored to have cost Disney more than one billion per park). **This expansion is breaking new boundaries in themed entertainment and will play a major role in the anticipated record attendance bump for both parks.**

Have you ever considered that Disney targets the same people we do? Clearly our churches aren't a business or an entertainment enterprise. **However, I think we can examine the Star Wars project and discover a few principles that we can apply in our churches.** After all, we're telling the greatest story of all time, and our story, unlike the one about making the Kessel Run in twelve parsecs, has eternal consequences in people's lives.

Here are a few lessons from Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge that we can apply to our churches:

Live Experiences Matter

It's fascinating that in an increasingly digitalized world, Disney is making such a massive investment in real-life adventure.

All of the coverage, in both professional and social media, seems to highlight the details of the live action adventure that Disney has developed for these new areas.

Disney is making a significant bet that the Star Wars parks will draw people not just for years but for decades to come. This should be a welcome cultural trend as we think about what we do at our churches. At the end of the day, **churches offer live experiences that ask people to leave the virtual world of their phones and computers to interact with real people in real spaces.**

As society becomes more obsessed with digitized activities, we have to continue to ask, **"How do we draw people together in the real world?"** The gathered body of Christ continues to be an important aspect of what it means to live and lead a church in our day.

As we look toward the future, **one of our highest priorities should be creating opportunities that simply cannot be replicated through a web browser or a phone app.**

Multi-Generational— For The Win!

A guiding principle of the Disney franchise is the idea that families can enjoy entertainment together. In fact, legend has it that Walt dreamt up Disneyland while sitting on a park bench with his own daughters, wishing for a place they could go to together and have fun as a family.

The need for family togetherness appears to be even greater now than it was when Disneyland first opened in 1955.



Staying that course, the Star Wars attraction is also designed for multiple generations to enjoy. **It's not just for folks like me who loved the original Star Wars franchise in the late '70s and early '80s, but also for Millennials who grew up watching the prequel trilogy of the late '90s and early 2000s and kids today whose first encounter with the Star Wars universe has only taken place within the last couple of years.**

Rather than basing the land in a place and time from an existing Star Wars story (like the moon of Endor from Return Of The Jedi or Jakku from The Force Awakens), this land introduces guests to a brand-new Star Wars planet, Batuu, and a place called The Black Spire Outpost. **This demonstrates a genius bit of storytelling because it draws people together from multiple generations, rather than ostracizing one fan base or another.**

This is a critical lesson for us as we lead our churches because church should and is meant to be multi-generational.

A church's investment in next-generation ministries—including both kids and student ministries—needs to be at the forefront of its efforts. We want families to come to our churches, but we also know that it's imperative to pass the message of Jesus on to the next generation. In the same way that Disney is focused on getting a younger generation excited about this franchise, we need to be passionate about passing on the message of Jesus.

How can our churches be more multi-generational in our ministries? What is it we're doing today that might be excluding the next generation? How can we build with other generations in mind?

High-Tech and High-Touch

One feature that is deeply intrinsic to the launch of Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge is the incredible weaving of both high-tech and high-touch experiences. The Disney Play App that accompanies the experience could be considered an attraction itself; the app allows guests to interact with a themed area in a way that theme parks have never done before. **It draws guests in with a familiar technological device and drives them towards a high-touch experience.**

Here's how it works: using your phone as a guide, you can interact with various elements and people within the park environment. Choose to join the Resistance or become part of the First Order; you experience the land in a unique way because of that choice. It's the choose-your-own-adventure kind of fun that allows for a custom visit unlike anyone else's. **The weaving of both technology and human experience will undoubtedly set the tone for park activities to come.**

Our phones are the most sophisticated communication devices that have ever been developed by man. **I often find it amusing that people are accustomed to pulling out their phones or laptops to take notes at conferences or workshops but not at church.** Why? Well, it's not considered "normal" (or sometimes even acceptable) within the church world.

What can your church do to integrate the technology people use on a regular basis?

Is there some aspect of technology that if introduced to your church would actually enhance people's discipleship journeys? How can we leverage the technology we regularly use to move people closer together with face to face experiences? **Rather than fighting technology, how do we integrate it with human experience to help people as they journey towards Jesus?**

One Park, Two Locations

It's fascinating that Disney decided to go bi-coastal and open Batuu in both U.S. parks. While in the coming months Star Wars fans will be able to ferret out the differences between these two parks (and I'm sure we'll hear some examples of how Disney chose to roll it out in slightly different manners), the opportunity exists in both places. You don't have to choose one or the other. It's amazing to me that Disney chose to launch a core product in two different, distinct markets.



What's the difference between Disneyland and Disney World? Here's one: Disneyland is really a regional park that people from Southern California visit on a regular basis, and although it hosts many international guests, it pales in comparison to the number of international visitors who travel to Disney World. Somewhere north of 80% of all guests that visit Disney World arrive in the area via plane rather than by car; most guests at Disneyland drive themselves there. [\[ref\]](#) The two attract completely different markets.

By opening Galaxy's Edge in both parks, Disney ensures maximum impact. **This is the first time in the company's history that a direct duplication of a core product took place at the same time in multiple parks.** While certain aspects of the parks or individual rides have been replicated from time to time, the Star Wars attraction demonstrates an aggressive expansion and investment in the franchise.

For us, it underlines the importance of the multi-site church movement. I know it's currently vogue for churches to consider getting out of multi-site. However, I would contend that many churches who got into it in the first place weren't actually doing multi-site by replicating their services in multiple places;

rather, they were launching different experiences in different locations. **In the way that Disney has taken the core intellectual property of Star Wars and replicated it in two different markets, they've clearly asked the question "How do we do the same thing in two places?" rather than "How do we do different things in two places?"**

It would appear that the churches leveraging the most out of multi-site long-term ask, **"How do we take the lessons that we've learned in one place and apply them to multiple locations rather than learning new lessons every time we go to a new place?"**

From my seat, Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge pushes us to think about how we can expand what God is doing in our churches and how can we take the good things that are happening in one place and see them happen in another.

Everyone Wants to Fly the Millennium Falcon

I just have to say that when I think about the Star Wars park, the part I'm most fired up about is the chance to sit with my wife and two kids in the cockpit of the Millennium Falcon and "fly" this famous starship. As people share online about their experiences at Galaxy's Edge, some have admitted to crying at the sight of that pile of space junk that made the famous Kessel Run all those years ago in a galaxy far, far away.

There's something about this iconic ship that draws people in and makes you want to push down that lever to make the jump to hyperspace (and likely shout, "Punch it, Chewie!" while you're at it). The Millennium Falcon appears to be a key piece of the Disney franchise going forward, even surviving the Skywalker family line (as we'll no doubt see in *The Rise of Skywalker*).

Disney understands that the experience of flying in the Millennium Falcon is a core element of the Star Wars franchise. **They've gone for the jugular here by offering their best technology in a ride in allowing people to actually fail (or almost fail, at least) within the ride, which adds an edge that we haven't seen in a Disney ride in the past.**

Similarly, we need to clarify the core experiences at our churches. **What draws people to our churches? What is it that people want to be a part of?** I would say that great teaching that connects timeless truths from thousands of years ago to life today should be at the core of what we do as a church.



In the same way that Disney has stayed focused on allowing people to engage in the stories that make the Star Wars franchise great, our churches need to stay focused on communicating the message of Jesus to our culture today in a way that connects people to this amazing story and motivates them to live a different life.

How can you apply these lessons from Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge to your church?

While this is just a land within a theme park in two parts of the country, it really does represent a larger cultural phenomenon. Watching how things are changing in the culture around us is an important part of being a church leader. I would love to hear what you're seeing in Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge that you could apply to your church and what lessons you might put into practice in the coming year. Leave your comments [here](#).

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