

- Numerous research studies have noted that between 60-80% of young people from ages 18-29 leave the church and their faith for an extended period of time. Now, these numbers are influenced by denominational Christianity, but still those number should terrify and sadden church leadership and parents. It would also be good to recognize that this isn't something that has just recently been an issue. All the way back in **Judges 2:10**, we read of a whole generation of people that arose in Israel who did not know the Lord, nor did they know of the work that He had done for Israel. They were ignorant of God and they did not follow after Him. Quite a sad time during the history of Israel.
- I think it is important for us to recognize that this type of problem isn't something that just randomly happens. There are many reasons for young people leaving their faiths and churches. Some leave their faith because they just don't feel it anymore. They have become apathetic. Sometimes young people just don't have an interest in spiritual things, but again there is more than likely a reason for that. Some leave because they begin to doubt their faith and the existence of God, and they never have those questions answered. Others leave because they don't see authentic religion and faith being practiced. Others walk away because they see the church and Christians as hypocritical. In fact, one study according to the Barna Group found that 87% of young people who don't go to church see Christians as judgmental and 85% see them as even worse, hypocritical. And then some walk away because they see the church as "uncool" and "out of date."
- While there is no single blanket reason for young people leaving the church, there are many reasons as we see. There are many contributing factors for these reasons. Many leaderships within churches and many families have wondered and struggled for some time trying to figure out what they can do to keep their young people from leaving The Way of Christ. I do not claim to have all the answers by any means, but I would like for us to look at some of man's ideas for how this problem can be solved. And then, I want us to look to God's Word and see what His wisdom would lead us to do in order to do everything we can to keep our young people in The Way.

I. What does not work...**A. ...changes in worship style**

1. Many leaders within the denominational community have come to the conclusion that changes in worship style are sure fire ways to draw young people back to the churches.
2. This type of think has led to the development of marketing departments and focus groups to help churches to mold their worship and operations around young people and their desires.
3. This type of thing has backfired on some churches because young people are not stupid. They recognize that this type of approach is more about just getting young people in the door than actually focusing on Jesus.
4. Young people are often sold short by being view as wanting nothing more than shallow religion, but there are, in fact, many that desire Jesus and His spiritual food and not shallow and empty Christianity.

B. ...more casual approach

1. Others have said that the way to draw young people in and keep them is by making the church much less churchy.
2. Instead of having the tradition setting of church and worship, many have gone for a much more casual approach to their coming together.
3. "Come just as you are" and "come share Jesus and coffee" are mantras that are shouted from all over to get young people to come and "experience Jesus without the religion."
4. Instead of solid gospel preaching, many churches go for the more "pep talky" approach that calls for living life to its fullest and enjoying it while you can.
5. Again, were selling young people short when we don't give them solid spiritual meat. Many of them are dying for it.

C. ...adding of entertainment

1. Many churches are going the entertainment route to attract young people to services.
2. There is much thinking that they are having to compete with the entertainment industry in order to keep the young people so the churches themselves become places of entertainment instead of places of worship.
3. Concert style worship with gimmicks and games are the norm in many places, today.
4. However, some young people aren't buying into this type of approach. If they want entertainment then they will go to concerts, sporting events and the like. Many young people are searching for the substance of Jesus not the shallowness of entertainment.

- * While this type of approach might draw in numbers at times, it doesn't build of the spiritual fibre of young people. Their faith is weak and their spirituality is shallow. We must take a Biblical approach to keeping our young people in The Way.

II. What does work...

- * **DISCLAIMER:** Some have taken **Proverbs 22:6** and have made it into an absolute rule. They would say that if a child becomes unfaithful or never obeys the Gospel then it must be because the parents didn't do their jobs right. However, we must remember that this is a proverb and not a solid rule. **Proverbs 10:27** is good evidence to show that Proverbs are not airtight rules. We are raising human beings with free will and not programable robots. These approaches are simply God given pieces of wisdom that will better our chances of keeping our young people in The Way.

- A. ...making God the priority
1. Family's make God the priority
 - We must have the attitude of Joshua when it comes to how our homes will be run in this life. **(Josh. 24:15,16)**
 - As parents, we must make sure that nothing at all comes before our service to God. Not sports, not academics, not hobbies, or anything else. Children must come to understand the importance of God above all else. The earlier we can instill that in their minds the better.
 - We can help this process by creating constant teaching moments and habits within our families in regards to prayer, study, and just speaking about God. **(Deut. 6:4-9)**
 2. Churches make God the priority.
 - The Church was established to be the "pillar and support of the truth." **(I Tim. 3:15)**
 - It's priority is to teach Jesus Christ and the truth of salvation through Him and Him alone.
 - It is not a place of recreation or entertainment. It is a place where dying souls come to learn about the brea of life that will give them the strength to get to heaven.
 3. This needs to happen because young people want more Jesus. They want to learn and grow stronger. They are not interested in the shallowness of much Christianity, today.
 4. This desire begins with parents emphasizing the necessity of Jesus in the lives of their young ones.
- B. ...avoiding hypocrisy
1. Parents saying and teaching one thing, but doing another can lead a young person in the completely opposite direction from the Lord.
 - Having parents that give lip service to God and spiritual things and then turn around and don't follow through can be the most damaging thing to a young person's perception of faith. **(Matt. 15:8)**
 - Having church members who teach and preach one way but that turn around and live another can completely warp and destroy the faith of a young person.
 2. Fake church members can be spotted a mile away by young people.
 - Young people have a keen sense for spotting those around them that are fake in their faith.
 - If all they ever seen growing up is fake faith, then no wonder so many possess that same kind of faith and eventually leave The Way all together.
 3. Young people desire Christianity and faith that are legitimate and full. They want to be around people who want to go to heaven and are doing everything possible to get there. We must be that type of people, not just for our own sakes but also for the sake of our young people.
 4. Judgements must be made without being The Judge. **(Matt. 7:1-3)** It is one thing for us to preach and teach love and following Christ's teachings, but it another thing to forget about love and become the judge of others. Young people and all people should desire fellow Christians who are willing to call sin sin, but also have patience and love to not cast final judgement but instead love and give every effort to restore.
- C. ...focusing on the kids
1. We focus on the young people by teaching them.
 - We, as parents, we make teaching them about the Lord our top priority. We truly raise them in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. **(Eph. 6:4)**
 - Parents are given the greatest responsibility in the raising of children and it must not be taken lightly.
 - As churches, we focus on teaching them as best we can as early as we can.
 2. We focus on the young people by converting them.
 - We teach them with the hope of one day converting them.
 - We want to snatch them out of the grasp of Satan, by leading them to Jesus and instilling in them a deep desire to commit their lives to Him by dying to self and living for Him. **(II Cor. 5:14-21)**
 3. We focus on the young people by strengthening them.
 - We don't just baptize them and then let them go on their way. No, we continue to teach them and strengthen their faith.
 - We do this by teaching them beyond just the first principles. We don't leave them like the Hebrews, but we teach them about the deeper issues of faith. **(Heb. 5:12-6:3)**
 4. We focus on the young people by equipping them.
 - We equip them with the tools to grow. We teach them how to study for themselves and know how to discern right from wrong. **(II Tim. 2:15)**
 - We help to give them the ability to become like the Bereans and posses their own faith through their own study of God's Word. **(Acts 17:11,12)**

The statistics are not pretty, but we can be sure to do our part to make sure that our young people remain faithful and continue on in The Way of Jesus Christ. Does this mean that every single young person will remain faithful? No, it doesn't mean that because they all have a mind of their own, but we sure can do a lot towards keeping them in the faith if we as parents and churches do our part to raise in the correct manner. May God help us to put in the effort to keep our young people, and may they grow up to lead the Lord's church as strong leaders and servants.