

Research Shows Why Young Adults Leave Church

A recent study of Protestant young adults highlights reasons why more than two-thirds stop attending church between ages 18 and 22.



A recent study of young Protestants found that more than two-thirds of young adults who once regularly attended church during high school stopped attending altogether during their crucial decision-making years following high school. Conducted by Lifeway Research, which is affiliated with the publishing arm of the Southern Baptist Convention, the study found that 70 percent of 18- to 30-year-olds stopped attending church for at least a year as young adults. The two major factors contributing to the decline in their church attendance were life changes and a lack of personal relationships in the church. Although 30 percent of the 70 percent that left the church said they made a conscious decision to leave the church after high school, the majority surveyed attributed their decline to either work responsibilities, moving away from their home church or moving to a college campus. Though the statistics are alarming, Brad Waggoner, vice president of research and ministry development at LifeWay, said it is within grasp to change the trends. "Relationships are often the glue that keep people in church, or serves as the attraction to begin attending again following a period of absenteeism," he said. "Many people are deeply influenced by friends and loved ones." The study found that the majority of 18- to 22-year-olds who remained in church felt that attending church was a vital part of their lives and helped guide their life decisions. They were also found to have strong relational ties to the church. "Clearly the reasons young people leave are a reflection both of their past experience in church and

the new opportunities they have as young adults,” said Scott McConnell, associate director of LifeWay Research. “To remain in church, a person must have experienced the value of the teaching and relationships at church and see the relevance for the next phase of life.”