

Are Churches Too Shallow? 59% of Seminary Students Want Nothing to Do With Full-Time Ministry

A few decades ago, 90% of graduates from Christian seminaries planned to pursue full-time jobs in ministry. But, in recent years, studies have shown that just 41% of seminary graduates anticipated finding a career in the church.

In other words, the majority of seminary students in 2020 do not plan to become pastors.

Why has there been such a radical shift?

An article published in *Christianity Today* titled “Non-Traditional Seminary Students are Changing the Church,” by Abby Perry, took a closer look at this phenomenon.

Perry maintains that there is a crisis of discipleship in the modern Western church, where churches are not providing robust theology and biblical knowledge to satisfy and nourish their members. Sermons are often light, “seeker-friendly” fare that fails to challenge the mature Christian.

“As the days of cultural Christianity and the moral majority become increasingly obsolete, faithful churches are producing disciples hungry for the Word,” writes Perry. “Individuals who have not found discipleship in the church are going to do what they have to do to find it.” For many, this looks like enrolling in seminary.

Wayne Johnson, associate dean and associate professor of biblical and pastoral theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, says, “We’ve lost the educational mandate that is part

of Christian discipleship,” he said. In recent decades, churches have emphasized emotion over intellect when it comes to religious experience.

This modern church environment is partially a result of the Second Great Awakening in the mid-1700s, where thunderous preachers like Jonathan Edwards made passionate altar calls to bring people to their knees. Ethan Renoe, writing for *Relevant Magazine*, argues that the church, in the last 200 years, “has begun discarding intelligence in favor of emotion, conversion, experiences and passion.”

Whatever the reason, the fact remains that many devout Christians are turning to seminary classrooms to learn and talk about the things they’re not hearing in church.

In Matthew 22:37, Jesus declares, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” Loving God with our minds is just as important as loving Him with our hearts.

There must be something for the church to learn from the rising numbers of people—from stay-at-home parents to doctors—pursuing seminary degrees.

Perry concludes with a call for churches and seminaries to join forces in order to provide Christians the spiritual nourishment we all need for our faith to grow. “We need to reclaim the local church as a place for theological formation and cultivate a collective imagination for how seminaries support that mission.”

The current bifurcation between church and education, worship and knowledge, need not remain. This might look like a seminary starting a mentorship program for its students with a local church, or offering a joint-degree program where students complete hands-on training at a local congregation.

“If seminaries and local churches don’t view themselves

through the lens of complementarity, then they're missing a tremendous opportunity in which the strength of one supplements and comes alongside the strength of the other," said Mark Young, president of Denver Seminary.

Wherever Christians are exercising their heart, soul and mind in an effort to love God, there He will be glorified. Working together, churches and seminaries have an opportunity to create the kind of spiritual environment where Jesus' command to "make disciples" can be fulfilled for everyone. {eo}

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