

Where Are People Leaving the Church Going?

John White has been a friend for many years. We first met in 2001 when he came to our home to hear Wolfgang Simson speak, near the beginning of the simple/organic/house church movement in this country. John now runs a community for followers of Jesus around the world who explore rhythms of life that result in vibrant churches meeting outside the walls of the building (). John is not normally an emotional guy, but he broke down in tears at “The Future of the Church Summit.” In this blogpost from the Lk10 site, he explains why:

Future of the Church Summit

I just returned from Loveland, CO where I attended a Conference sponsored by Group Publishing with about 130 church leaders on “The Future of the Church”. On the last day, I was part of a panel and was asked to share a bit about LK10. Click on my picture below to hear what happened when I started to talk...

(By the way, make sure you see more information about Josh Packard’s research below my video.)

While there were many presenters at the Summit, the most important, by far was Josh Packard. Josh is a sociologist who’s research has uncovered the fact that 65 million Americans (31% of the adult population) are what he calls the “Dones”. These are people who were once part of a church. In fact, they were often leaders, the “best and the brightest” according to Josh, but they are now “done” with church as they have known it. What’s more, these people, for the most part, aren’t going back. I can’t tell you what a staggering statistic this is!

The picture that came to me was Morpheus talking to Neo in the movie *The Matrix*. (Although Josh is nothing like Morpheus!) Morpheus: *Let me tell you why you are here. You are here because you know something. What you know you can't explain. But, you feel it. You felt it your entire life. That there is something wrong with the world (or the church?). You don't know what it is but it's there. Like a splinter in your mind.*

Click on the photo to watch this 5 minute clip of Morpheus talking to Neo.

For a long time, a great many people have had this “splinter in their mind” regarding church but they couldn’t explain it. And, now Josh has pulled the cover back and exposed what is really going on.

Two ways to hear more of what Josh has uncovered...

- 8 minute video describing the “Dones” (“They are not “casual Christians” or occasional attendees. Most were in some leadership position in their church.”
- 90 minute video. In depth interview with Josh Packard about the “Dones”. (“Most of these people are not coming back.”)

Back to the Future

While the Dones are not going back to the institutional church no matter how much it is “tweaked”, most of them have not abandoned God. In fact, some say that they have left “the church” to preserve their faith. And, the kind of church they are interested in looks surprisingly like the church portrayed in the book of Acts. Here are some of the characteristics of that church ...

1. All the churches in the Bible met in a home and functioned like a small spiritual family. The current institutional church, by contrast, spends a great deal of energy and money getting and maintaining a church

building.

2. The churches in the Bible were simple. We describe “simple church” as a way of being/doing church where any believer could say, “I could do that!”. (“they were astonished that Peter and John were unschooled, ordinary men” (Acts 4:13).) The institutional church, by contrast, requires highly educated, highly school (seminary, etc.) highly creative people to be successful. (Think Rick Warren, for instance.)
3. In the New Testament (NT) churches, everyone used their gifts. In institutional church, only a few, highly gifted people (worship leaders, preachers, etc.) use their gifts.
4. In NT church, Jesus brought the agenda for the meetings. In institutional churches, a few, very smart people design the worship experiences.
5. In the NT, churches were started in a few hours or a few days. Institutional churches require a great deal of planning and resources and take months or years to start.

Next step?

Want to learn more about doing/being church outside the institutional church? Check out a free four week course called Church 101.

*Adapted from **Felicity Dale**’s blog, Kingdom Women. Felicity Dale is an author and an advocate for women in the church. She trains people to start simple, organic house churches around the world.*