

Study: Why Young People Leave the Church

A recent study conducted by the Barna Group provides explanations as to why young American Christians are leaving the church. Reasons include a general idea that the church is overprotective, and that Christianity is too exclusive.

The Barna Group conducts studies on spirituality—especially Christianity in the United States today. This particular study was comprised of eight national studies, including interviews with teenagers, young adults, parents, youth pastors and senior pastors.

There is not one overwhelming reason that young Christians leave the church determined, the Barna Group reports. Six significant themes were uncovered as to why three out of every five young Christians leave the church temporarily or permanently.

Young people were reported to leave the church for the following reasons: (1) The church is overprotective. (2) Teens' and 20-somethings' experience of Christianity is shallow. (3) Churches come across as antagonistic to science. (4) Young Christians' church experiences related to sexuality are often simplistic, judgmental. (5) They wrestle with the exclusive nature of Christianity. (6) The church feels unfriendly to those who doubt. [Click here to read research findings with fuller explanations of these concerns.](#)

In one sense, these findings are nothing new. Evangelist Sammy Tippit points out that the church has always dealt with the tension of inquiring young minds and Christian values.

“Young people are in a transitional period,” notes Tippit. “They’re in a period of becoming independent. They’re in a period of trying to discover for themselves who they are, what

their purpose is. That's difficult for the church because the church has some very solid concrete values."

Tippit believes today's American culture has indeed exasperated these issues. But the most concerning of the findings, says Tippit, is that young people struggle with Christianity claiming to be the only way—an idea central to the gospel (i.e. John 14:6).

"Somehow, we are not communicating what the gospel is to our young people," laments Tippit. "Of course, we live in this society that says anything and everything is OK, and that we ought to accept other things. [It's important to know how] to deal with that and how to share what the gospel really is: who Jesus is and why He came. Until you grasp that, the other issues that surround that (the exclusive nature of Christianity) all become very difficult to comprehend."

For today's parents, Tippit has a few suggestions as to how to combat these church-leaving symptoms. For one thing, Tippit suggests, parents need to provide a firm foundation of Christian teachings and values to begin with, and then let them ask questions when they get to that point.

"That's one of the real keys that the church has to understand: You can't keep young people in a little box. It's not going to work. You've got to give them the liberty to fail, the liberty to reach out and discover for themselves. But you've got to put something in them foundationally that will enable them to deal with those issues."

Secondly, Tippit adds, parents and Christian adults need to be earnestly seeking Christ and modeling godly principles themselves. "We need to show them authentic Christianity: the kind of Christianity that is so real and so exciting that when they look at everything else, it just looks like, 'Hey, this is where I need to be.'"

Thirdly, Christian adults need to pray. Pray for revival in

America, which has often historically begun with youth.

Finally, education on the subject is vital. Tippit suggests the books *Prayer Factor* and *Praying for Your Family* as two good options.