

Youth Groups Driving Christian Teens to Abandon Faith

A new study might reveal why a majority of Christian teens abandon their faith upon high school graduation. Some time ago, Christian pollster George Barna documented that 61 percent of today's 20-somethings who had been church-ed at one point during their teen years are now spiritually disengaged. They do not attend church, read their Bible or pray.

According to a new five-week, three-question national survey sponsored by the National Center for Family-Integrated Churches (NCFIC), the youth group itself is the problem. Fifty-five percent of American Christians are concerned with modern youth ministry because it's too shallow and too entertainment-focused, resulting in an inability to train mature believers. But even if church youth groups had the gravitas of Dallas Theological Seminary, 36 percent of today's believers are convinced youth groups themselves are not even biblical.

After answering three questions at [nfcic.org](#), each survey participant received NCFIC Director Scott Brown's e-book entitled *Weed in the Church: How A Culture of Age Segregation Is Destroying the Younger Generation, Fragmenting the Family and Harming Church* as well as access to a 50-minute-long documentary entitled *Divided: Is Modern Youth Ministry Multiplying or Dividing the Church?* (*Divided* has been viewed by 200,000 people.)

The survey is still active online through Friday, Nov. 8.

Adam McManus, a spokesman for NCFIC, is not surprised by the church's deep concerns about youth groups.

"Today's church has created peer dependency," McManus says. "The inherent result of youth groups is that teenagers in the church are focused on their peers, not their parents or their pastors. It's a foreign sociology that leads to immaturity, a greater likelihood of sexual activity, drug experimentation and a rejection of the authority of the Word of God.

"Proverbs 13:20 says, 'He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm.' The result is that the youth stumble, they can't see beyond their noses, and spiritual adolescence is prolonged well into adulthood. It's crippling the body of Christ. That's why it's time to return to the biblical paradigm and throw out the youth group structure entirely."

He continues, "I am greatly encouraged by the results of our survey. American Christians are finally waking up to the disconnect between the clear teaching in Scripture in favor of family-integration and the modern-day church's obsession with dividing the family at every turn. Age segregation, especially during the tender and impactful teenage years, not only hasn't worked, it's been detrimental. Even worse, it is contrary to the Bible. But the good news is that practices in the churches related to youth groups are changing dramatically. Twenty years ago no one was even asking this question."

McManus cited the following Scriptures to document his contention that it's God's will for the church to embrace the biblical model of families staying together in the service as the Word of God is preached: Deuteronomy 16:9-14, Joshua 8:34-35, Ezra 10:1, 2 Chronicles 20:13, Nehemiah 12:43 and Joel 2:15-16.

"Our fervent prayer is that God will raise up Spirit-filled, Bible-preaching, Christ-centered, family-integrated assemblies from the ashes of our man-centered, family-fragmenting churches," McManus adds. "Plus, the church needs to begin to equip Christian fathers to communicate the gospel to their

families. Today, Christian parents are beginning to realize that they have not fulfilled their spiritual duties by simply dropping off their kiddos to Sunday school and youth group, allowing other parents to disciple their children by proxy.

“Let’s not forget the powerful words spoken by Moses in Deuteronomy 6:4-7: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.’

“It is the parents’ primary obligation to disciple their own children, impressing God’s commandments upon them in the home on a daily basis.”

Cameron Cole, youth director at Cathedral Church of the Advent in Birmingham, Ala., says, “There is a propensity in our culture to outsource the development of our children. For intellectual development, we send them to school. For athletic development, we send them to Little League. And for spiritual formation, we send them to youth group. The church has done a poor job of communicating to the parents that they are the primary disciplers of their children. Parents don’t believe this, but the reality is that kids listen to their parents far more than they’re going to listen to a youth minister.”

“It’s time for the Christian father to take the central role which God has ordained,” McManus concludes. “Gathered around the dining room table, the father needs to lead family worship once again, which had been standard behavior for a vibrant American Christian family for hundreds of years, dating back to the Plymouth, Mass., colony of 1620. Dad needs to read from and discuss the Bible, sing Christian songs and pray with his family, his little flock over which God has appointed him shepherd. Frankly, I’m not as concerned about what happens

in Sunday school in church as I am with what happens in
'Monday school' and 'Tuesday school' at home with the family."