

life groups study guide

How Do I Reintroduce Faith to My Kids

Who No Longer Believe?



Texts: 1 Cor 6:11-13; 2 Cor 5:10-21; 6:1-10; 2 Tim 3:1-4, 14-17.

What do you do when your child walks away from the church or from the faith? This is not a new question BTW – for quite a while church leaders and parents have been talking about the “dropout” problem. One writer describes it as “The Great Departure” – the large numbers of Christian young people, ages 18 to 30, who leave the church either temporarily or permanently. How bad is it? Well, as Matt mentioned in the sermon, the Barna Research Group (started by Christian pollster George Barna) states that

“Nearly six in ten (59%) of these young people who grow up in Christian churches end up walking away either from their faith or from the institutional church at some point in the first decade of their adult life.”

So the church is batting .400 – great for a baseball player, but pretty lousy for anyone interested in customer retention.

Q: Almost everyone either knows someone who has left the church at some point or has left the church themselves for a time. What is your story? If you left for a while, why? Why did you return? What reasons do relatives or friends who left give? Looking back, were your reasons genuine or more likely just excuses?

It’s not all bad news, as we will see later, but first, let’s look at some definitions and at some of the reasons for this exodus.

Definitions: Matt quotes from David Kinnaman, author of *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians are Leaving Church . . . and Rethinking Faith*. Here are his definitions of generations:

- Millennials or Mosaics or Gen Y: Those born from 1984 to 2002.
- Busters (from the relatively low numbers) or Gen X: born 1965 to 1983.
- Boomers: born 1946 to 1964.
- Elders or “Builders” or “greatest generation”: born prior to 1946.

Reasons for Leaving:

A. From Carey Nieuwhof:

- Church is irrelevant; leaders are hypocritical and have too much moral failure.
- God is missing.
- Legitimate doubt is unwelcome.
- Not learning about God.
- Not finding community or real relationships.

B. From Kinnaman (He does not necessarily agree with all of these – they are just the reasons people give):

- Overprotective: like “helicopter” parents – lots of dos and don’ts.
- Shallow: Church encourages a superficial faith without sacrifice.

- Antiscience: Church does not educate, just tells us to “believe.”
- Repressive: Many see the church as “out of step” on sexuality (Kinnaman makes it clear that many use this as an excuse so they can be “free”).
- Exclusive: Christianity and Jesus Christ as the “only way” is seen as archaic and intolerant today and many young people struggle with this.
- Doubtless: Agreement with Nieuwhof here – any doubt is forbidden.

Q: Which of these reasons for leaving the church or for leaving the Christian faith carry the most weight with you and why? Which of these reasons seems the weakest or seems like just an excuse so that people can live in any manner that pleases them?

Q: Does the church in general, or Kingsway in particular, fall short in some of these areas? Which ones and in what ways?

Q: Even after listing “reasons for leaving,” Kinnaman believes that the real reason behind the dropout problem is *a discipleship issue*. Understanding of Scripture, doctrine, spiritual formation, and church history has never been that good but the problem is greater now because Millennials are growing up in such a rapidly changing culture. Do you agree with this assessment? Why or why not? Where does the responsibility lie for better preparing young Christians?

Reasons for Hope: Kinnaman sees much evidence for hope, first of all because of the power and providence of God, but secondly for the following reasons:

1. The majority of young dropouts are not walking away from Christianity; rather they are putting their church involvement on hold. He classifies dropouts into three classes: nomads, exiles, and prodigals (See *You Lost Me* for more info). Nomads and exiles are still believers but are not connected to any church. Only the prodigals have actually “left the faith.”
2. Many of the reasons for leaving (see above) actually reflect a desire for a more demanding faith. Kinnaman says that “Millennials are craving depth – a need the church is uniquely poised to meet.”
3. Of course, many people never leave and many others come back. Kinnaman sees 5 reasons why Millennials stay connected or reconnect.

Five Reasons Millennials will stay in the Church or come back to the Church:

1. Make room for meaningful relationships. “The first factor that will engage Millennials at church is as simple as it is integral: relationships.” This cannot be limited to peers. Most young people who stay faithful had at least one adult (older) friend or mentor. “*All of you together are Christ’s body, and each of you is a part of it*” (1 Cor 12:27). All Christians in all generations are part of the same body and we need each other badly!

Q: Have you experienced good relationships with older or younger Christians that have helped your faith? Any relationships that you believe kept you from leaving the church or kept you from leaving the faith?

Q: What factors in churches limit edifying relationships between older and younger Christians?

2. Teach cultural discernment. Young Christians need to learn how to be “in the world but not of the world” (Jn 15:18-19; 17:14-15; Rom 12:2). Millennial Christians who have stayed in the church

are twice as likely to believe that they can be a positive force in society compared to dropouts. Paul said this to the young man Timothy: *“But you must remain faithful to the things you have been taught. You know they are true, for you know you can trust those who taught you. You have been taught the Holy Scriptures from childhood, and they have given you the wisdom to receive the salvation that comes by trusting in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work.”* 2 Tim 3:14-17

Q: What are the two extremes that Christians often go to in relation to “the world?” What aspects of our culture do you have the most trouble relating to or dealing with?

Q: From the verses in 2 Timothy, list the benefits of knowing God’s Word well. What does Paul say Scripture does to enable Christians to be active in the world?

3. Make reverse mentoring a priority. What does this mean? It means being humble enough to learn from younger Christians, and then letting them and encouraging them to fulfill their purpose in the Body of Christ. When Paul uses the body metaphor (Rom 12 and 1 Cor 12) to describe the church, he makes it very clear that every part has a purpose and benefits the entire body. Churches that help young believers discover a sense of mission also help develop in them a faith that lasts.

Q: Can you recall a time when you were blessed by or learned from a younger Christian? Were you surprised? Think of some younger people (30ish or younger) in Scripture whom God used in great ways. How old was Jesus when He began His public ministry?

4. Embrace the potency of vocational discipleship. Ok, that’s a mouthful, but they are Kinnaman’s words and he’s a smart man. All it means is that God has created each person with gifts, abilities, passions, etc. in order to fulfill His purposes for Himself, for them, and for the church. In other words, God has given every Christian a “calling” or “vocation.” This may or may not refer to how a person makes a living. Paul’s calling was to be an Apostle, but he earned his keep by making tents. Active Millennial Christians are 3 times more likely than dropouts to believe that God has given them a calling. Paul says, *“So we have stopped evaluating others from a human point of view. At one time we thought of Christ merely from a human point of view. How differently we know him now! This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!”* 2 Cor 5:15-16

Q: Do you believe that God has given you a calling within the church and in the world? Do you think most believers at Kingsway feel that they can use their gifts and passions in the church and also in their work – in or outside the home? Do you believe that the Bible applies to your field or career interests?

5. Facilitate connection with Jesus. This should be a no-brainer, right? This is what the church does. But apparently, the church does not always do this well, but it is very important in developing a lasting faith. Active Millennial Christians were almost 3 times more likely than dropouts to say that Jesus Christ speaks to them personally. They are almost 4 times more likely to believe that the Bible contains wisdom that applies to their lives.

Consider Paul’s words again: *“Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ and become one with him”* Philippians 3:8-9. If time, read 2 Cor 5:18-21.

Q: Can you read Paul's words and honestly mean them for yourself? I can't – at least not very often. There are so many other things in life that we attach value to, and many of them are good things – family for example. Are there any spiritual disciplines that you practice that help you to stay close to Jesus?

C.S. Lewis has said that: *“Every age has its own outlook. It is specially good at seeing certain truths and specially liable to make certain mistakes.”*

The different generations in the church need each other. Millennials need older Christians to pour into their lives and we older Christians need them. Any generation that is missing leaves the church poorer and more liable to “make certain mistakes.” Each of us is part of the one Body of Christ.