

What Good Is Church?
(appropriate for High Schoolers and older)
Michael R. Daily, August 2009

(Portions taken from Rev. John S. Mahon, Grace Community International, Houston, TX)

(ref1: K. Ham & B. Beemer, "Already Gone: Why Your Kids Will Quit Church And What You Can Do To Stop It", Master Books, 2009)
(ref2: Kinnaman & Lyons, "Unchristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity & Why It Matters", BakerBooks, 2007)

2/3 of children who grow up in a Bible believing church will stop attending church as young adults. Half of these will eventually return to church when they have kids, the other half will not.

Divide the kids into 3 groups. Assign a student leader for each group. Each group will be given a written description of who they are and a question to answer. They have 5 minutes to discuss and write down their answers as if they were the person described in the handout. Each group should have multiple answers (the more the better). At the end of the 5 minutes the groups will come back together and each group leader will read the description and the answers their group came up with. Write their answers on the board. As you go through the following study circle their answer that corresponds to each section as you cover it.

Group 1 – Leaves Church But Comes Back

You are 20 years old. You grew up in a Bible believing church, went to church every Sunday, and participated in AWANAs. Now you are on your own, at college, in the military, or perhaps, working full time in your first real job. For some reason you no longer go to church except on special occasions like Christmas and Easter but you believe in God and that the Bible is true. You fully intend to return to church once you are married and have children because you think its important for your kids to be raised in that type of environment. But for some reason you're not attending church right now and probably won't until the kids come along. Tell us why.

These people are typically Christians who believe the Bible is relevant but have found church to not be relevant to their lives or have found the other people in the church personally discouraging and more focused on the traditions of man than the Word of God.

Discouragement

Mark 7:6-8

And He said to them, "Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: 'THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME. 7'BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.' 8"Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men."

Some church members are discouraging to others because of their emphasis on the traditions of men at the expense of the commandments of God.

A few months ago I was sitting in the church service with my family and it was time for the offering plate to be passed around. I never put anything in the offering plate. The usher who had noticed this for many weeks finally made a rude comment to me about my lack of leadership and spirituality since I never put anything in the offering plate. It was the middle of the service and I was not in a position to explain. I go to a large church and this man was not in my age group so he did not know me and yet he felt that making judgmental comments to me was perfectly fine. I have no idea what the pastor talked about that Sunday but I know I left church that day knowing that at least one person at that church thought less of me than if I had not attended that day. Now I have been around long enough to know that this person was an immature Christian and to ignore what they think but if I had been a young Christian or a non-christian and experienced this type of treatment I would start questioning the value of attending church. By the way, the reason I don't put anything in the offering plate is that my company takes the funds directly out of my check and sends the money to my church. Was I obeying the commandment of God? Yes. Was I observing the tradition of men? No.

I was judged because I neglected the traditions of men even though I obeyed the commandment of God. There will be times when you will experience this type of discouragement at church.

Matthew 13:24-30

Jesus presented another parable to them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. ²⁵"But while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went away. ²⁶"But when the wheat sprouted and bore grain, then the tares became evident also. ²⁷"The slaves of the landowner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?' ²⁸"And he said to them, 'An enemy has done this!' The slaves said to him, 'Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?' ²⁹"But he said, 'No; for while you are gathering up the tares, you may uproot the wheat with them. ³⁰'Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn.'"

Who are the tares? They are non-Christians. Some church members are discouraging to others because they are not really Christians.

The senior pastor of my current church often reminds us that he was a youth pastor for 8 years before he became a Christian! It happens.

Not Relevant

Another problem is that the church may seem to be irrelevant. If you have grown up in the church there can come a time when it may seem like you are hearing the same things over and over. You may feel like you are not learning anything new and what you are learning are not things that seem relevant to your life.

Part of the reason for this is the local church has to deal with a wide cross-section of society and the resources to do so are limited. As our society moves farther away from Biblical principles many local churches find themselves putting their energies into "stopping the bleeding" for people who are dealing with and recovering from many problems. But you may be in a situation where what you need is to stretch and grow and be challenged. Instead of having a bleeding problem it may be that what you really need is to be "pumping some iron". Some churches may be able to meet this need but many may not be able to. After a while you may start to wonder if its worth the time to go to church and you may stop going.

How Should We Respond to Discouragement or Irrelevancy?

Christians who find church to not be relevant or who find it discouraging often stop attending any church. Is this the best way to deal with the situation?

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. ¹⁰For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up. ¹¹Furthermore, if two lie down together they keep warm, but how can one be warm alone? ¹²And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart.

Hebrews 3:12-13

Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. ¹³But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

Encouraging Options

Find a group of Christians that genuinely challenges, stretches, and encourages you either within the church or in a parachurch group. If you can't find a local church that meets the need try a parachurch group. What is a parachurch group? A parachurch group is an organization of Christians not affiliated with any particular local church who focus on a particular area of the Christian life. The list of parachurch organizations is very long and includes organizations such as The Navigators, Campus Crusade for Christ, Awana, InterVarsity, Gideons, Focus on the Family, Worldview Academy, Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, and many, many others. If this is what you need to do to get the encouragement and challenge you need that's fine. There is nothing wrong with that.

So, if I am getting my encouragement from one of these other groups do I still need to attend church? Yes.

Matthew 20:25-28

But Jesus called them to Himself and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. ²⁶"It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, ²⁷and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; ²⁸just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

Romans 12:16-17

Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly Do not be wise in your own estimation. ¹⁷Never pay back evil for evil to anyone Respect what is right in the sight of all men.

II Corinthians 8:21

for we have regard for what is honorable, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men.

I Peter 2:13-15

Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, ¹⁴or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. ¹⁵For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men.

Is the church a human institution or does it belong to God? The church as mentioned in the Bible is any group of believers and as such belongs to God, it is the bride of Christ. On the other hand the local church in many cultures also has characteristics of a human institution. In order to silence the ignorance of foolish men and to do what is honorable and right in the sight of men we need to respect the local church even if our primary source of encouragement happens to be a less formal group of Christians. We can do this by serving.

Key Point: We attend church primarily to serve other Christians and help them grow. Our personal encouragement may come from the local church or may come from a parachurch organization.

Group 2 – Leaves Church, Does Not Come Back

You are 20 years old. You grew up in a Bible believing church, went to church every Sunday, and participated in AWANAs. Now you are on your own, at college, in the military, or perhaps, working full time in your first real job. For some reason you no longer go to church and have no intention of ever going back....ever. You have no interest in the Bible or prayer and have no intention of taking your future kids to church. Tell us why.

I Corinthians 1:20-24

Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. ²²For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; ²³but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, ²⁴but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

Two types of people are mentioned in verse 22. Who are they? What does each of them seek?

(I Corinthians 9:19-23)

For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more. ²⁰To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law; ²¹to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law. ²²To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some. ²³I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it.

Greeks Search for Wisdom

Greeks seek wisdom. In the culture you live in in America what is considered the primary source of wisdom? Science is. So, in the mind of today's "Greek", science has the last word. Therefore, it is critical for these people to be shown a credible, "persuasive case" that faith in God and His Bible is compatible with science (observational science) and to show the limitations of science such that this barrier to faith can be removed. If the Bible is presented in the form of cartoonish types of stories or fairy tales these people will not be interested. This is why apologetics is important - to be able to show that the Bible is credible from a scientific standpoint.

The "Greek": If I can't believe the book of Genesis is true why should I believe any of the Bible is true?

Jews Ask for Signs

Some people are looking for things that work. Although we don't obey the Bible because it works (sometimes, in the short run, it may not seem to) Biblical commands are for our benefit and, over the long run, are beneficial. So, these people need to be shown how to apply the Bible such that it addresses real issues and problems they are dealing with. We also need to show them that things that don't seem to work are really being used by God to deepen our Faith and develop our Character and, therefore, are working from an eternal perspective. These people are looking for evidence that God's ways, as presented in the Bible, are better – that they work. Therefore, it is critical that we present a "persuasive case" that God's ways, as presented in the Bible, are better than other approaches. The evidence comes from the Bible, from observing our lives, and from statistical analysis.

This type of person wants to see some evidence. After all our "Book" says that us Christians are supposed to be "New Creatures".

(II Corinthians 5:17)

Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

They don't expect us to be perfect but, after all, if we are supposed to be new creatures then, as a population, there should be some statistical difference between us and everyone else. Is there?

Unfortunately, the way American Christians live is having a big impact. The famous bumper sticker says, "Christians aren't perfect, just forgiven". However, the data shows that another bumper sticker could also say, "Christians aren't perfect, they are not even different". A study done in 2007 had the following results:

When asked to identify their activities over the last 30 days, born-again believers were just as likely as non-christians to bet or gamble, to visit a pornographic website, to take something that did not belong to them, to consult a medium or psychic, to physically fight or abuse someone, to have consumed enough alcohol to be considered legally drunk, to have used an illegal, nonprescription drug, to have said something that was not true, to have gotten back at someone for something he or she did, to have said mean things behind another person's back, and to have an intimate sexual encounter outside of marriage. (ref2, pg 47)

But the good news is it only takes one person living God's way to make an impact.

My wife never wanted to have children because she had never seen it handled in a way that seemed to work. Even though the vast majority of Christians raised their kids the same way the world does it only took one example (John and Eleanor Mahon) to give her the confidence she needed that it could be done right and that God's ways were the right ways. Today we have three children.

Good news: most people only need to see one example of "doing it right" to remove this barrier to unbelief. You can be that one person.

The "Jew": If its not real, if it does not help me in some tangible way, why should I spend the time?

Faith

Showing people credible ways that the Bible addresses scientific issues and the relational issues of life removes barriers to faith and makes the Bible come alive and seem relevant to their lives.

Having said that faith is still required, which brings us to the most important issue. Some people, most people, don't follow Christ because they don't want to. They love this life and are not willing to submit to His authority and the authority of the Bible because they might lose that which they love – the things of this world. Our role at this point is to preach Christ crucified and let them make their decision.

(John 12:24-26)

"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. ²⁵He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal. ²⁶If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him.

(Psalm 101:3) - I will set no worthless thing before my eyes; I hate the work of those who fall away; It shall not fasten its grip on me.

(I Timothy 6:8-12)

If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content. ⁹But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. ¹¹But flee from these things, you man of God, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness. ¹²Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

Group 3 – Continues Attending Church

You are 20 years old. You grew up in a Bible believing church, went to church every Sunday, and participated in AWANAs. Now you are on your own, at college, in the military, or perhaps, working full time in your first real job. Although 75% of people in your age group do not attend church - you do. Although 66% of the kids you went to church with while growing up no longer attend – you do. Its obvious to everyone that you are a little strange, being willing to give up 25% of your precious weekends for something of such questionable value. Nevertheless, you continue to faithfully attend church. Tell us why.

We live in enemy territory. There is a battle going on and Satan is at work. There will be casualties – there will be those who fall away. (I John 5:19, Ephesians 6:12, I Peter 5:8, II Timothy 4:10)

(Matthew 13:18-23)

"Hear then the parable of the sower. ¹⁹When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is the one on whom seed was sown beside the road. ²⁰The one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; ²¹yet he has no firm root in himself, but is only temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away. ²²And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. ²³And the one on whom seed was sown on the good soil, this is the man who hears the word and understands it; who indeed bears fruit and brings forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty."

The question is: How many will fall away before you decide to quit? What if your best friend quits? Will you quit if 25% of the Christians you know fall away? What about 50%. What if 75% fall away? Will you remain faithful to Christ? What if 85% fall away? How about 95%? How about 99%? These people must know something you don't know. When will you give up on following Christ?

Gen. Robert E. Lee to Lt. Gen. James Longstreet, July 2, 1863, Gettysburg, Penn.

"We don't fear our own deaths, you and I. We protect ourselves out of military necessity, not fear... We are prepared for our own deaths and for the deaths of comrades. We learned that at the Point. But I have seen this happen: We are not prepared for as many deaths as we have to face, inevitably as the war goes on. There comes a time... We are never prepared for so many to die.... No one is. We expect some chosen few. We expect an occasional empty chair, a toast to dear departed comrades. Victory celebrations for most of us, a hallowed death for a few. But the war goes on. And the men die. The price gets ever higher. Some officers... can pay no longer. We are prepared to lose some of us. But never all of us. Surely not all of us. But that is the trap. You can hold nothing back when you attack. You must commit yourself totally. And yet if they all die, a man must ask himself, will it have been worth it?"

(Hebrews 6:10-12)

For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints. ¹¹And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, ¹²so that you will not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

There is great reward for those who continue in obedience when others fall away.

(Matthew 7:13-14)

"Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. ¹⁴For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it. You will always be in the minority. Don't be surprised by this.

(Genesis 18:26-32)

So the LORD said, "If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare the whole place on their account." ²⁷And Abraham replied, "Now behold, I have ventured to speak to the Lord, although I am but dust and ashes. ²⁸"Suppose the fifty righteous are lacking five, will You destroy the whole city because of five?" And He said, "I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there." ²⁹He spoke to Him yet again and said, "Suppose forty are found there?" And He said, "I will not do it on account of the forty." ³⁰Then he said, "Oh may the Lord not be angry, and I shall speak; suppose thirty are found there?" And He said, "I will not do it if I find thirty there." ³¹And he said, "Now behold, I have ventured to speak to the Lord; suppose twenty are found there?" And He said, "I will not destroy it on account of the twenty." ³²Then he said, "Oh may the Lord not be angry, and I shall speak only this once; suppose ten are found there?" And He said, "I will not destroy it on account of the ten."

God will spare an entire city for a few righteous men. One person, wholly devoted to God, will have an impact.

(Psalm 91:1-7)

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High Will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. 2I will say to the LORD, "My refuge and my fortress, My God, in whom I trust!" 3For it is He who delivers you from the snare of the trapper And from the deadly pestilence. 4He will cover you with His pinions, And under His wings you may seek refuge; His faithfulness is a shield and bulwark. 5You will not be afraid of the terror by night, Or of the arrow that flies by day; 6Of the pestilence that stalks in darkness, Or of the destruction that lays waste at noon. 7A thousand may fall at your side And ten thousand at your right hand, But it shall not approach you.

God will protect and keep you regardless of how many others fall away.

Conclusions

Follow Christ. Find a group of Christians that challenge you, stretch you, and encourage you in the commandments of God. This group may be at church or may be a parachurch group. View the local church as a place where you can serve others. Show people by your life and by your teachings that the ways of God in the Bible are relevant to their relationships and to the real world of science. Attack the hard issues – God's Word is up to the challenge. Decide now that you will never quit – no matter how many others may fall away.

Group 1 – Leaves Church But Comes Back

You are 20 years old.

You grew up in a Bible believing church, went to church every Sunday, and participated in AWANAs.

Now you are on your own, at college, in the military, or perhaps, working full time in your first real job.

For some reason you no longer go to church except on special occasions like Christmas and Easter but you believe in God and that the Bible is true.

You fully intend to return to church once you are married and have children because you think its important for your kids to be raised in that type of environment.

But for some reason you are not attending church right now & probably won't until the kids come along.

Tell us why.

Group 2 – Leaves Church, Doesn't Come Back

You are 20 years old.

You grew up in a Bible believing church, went to church every Sunday, and participated in AWANAs.

Now you are on your own, at college, in the military, or perhaps, working full time in your first real job.

For some reason you no longer go to church and have no intention of ever going back....ever.

You have no interest in the Bible or prayer and have no intention of taking your future kids to church.

Tell us why.

Group 3 – Continues Attending Church

You are 20 years old.

You grew up in a Bible believing church, went to church every Sunday, and participated in AWANAs.

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Its obvious to everyone that you are a little strange, being willing to give up 25% of your precious weekends for something of such questionable value.

Nevertheless, you continue to faithfully attend church.

Tell us why.

QUIET TIMES ALONE WITH GOD

JEREMIAH 15:16

THEME: *What Good Is Church?*

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Mark 7:6-8*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Matthew 13:24-30*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Ecclesiastes 4:9-12, Hebrews 3:12-13*

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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Romans 12:16-17, II Corinthians 8:21*

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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *I Corinthians 1:20-24, I Corinthians 9:19-23*

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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *John 12:24-26*

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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *II Corinthians 5:17*

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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Psalms 101:3, I Timothy 6:8-12*

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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Hebrews 6:10-12*

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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Genesis 18:26-33*

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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Psalms 91:1-8*

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