



## **Committed Christians Who Don't Attend Church**

George Barna writes in a December 2005 *Barna Update* that a rapidly growing number of Americans with a strong interest in experiencing God have either dropped out of church altogether or still attend church but it's no longer their primary religious place to meet. Instead, they're opting for new ways of experiencing and expressing their faith such as through house churches or marketplace ministries. Following are a few thoughts regarding this developing trend. Look them over and see what you think.

### **Attending Some Churches Can be Dangerous to Your Spiritual Health**

Over the years I've always assumed that attending a church - any evangelical church - was better than becoming unchurched. However, the issue the Barna article raises is maybe this isn't the case. Perhaps some - even many - of our struggling evangelical American churches do more harm than good. For example, many of them are barely keeping their doors open which can have an extremely demoralizing effect on those who attend. Others are reeling from power struggles as pastors, board persons, patriarchs, and other lay leaders vie for control of the church. Still others appeal to an older clientele such as the retired builder generation. These are "one big, happy family churches" that hire a chaplain to take care of them and protect them from the world out there.

This only serves to "turn off" many of the younger generations as well as some boomers who leave these churches, vowing never to return to them or any others for that matter. Here's the question: Wouldn't we be better off by not exposing ourselves and our families to these spiritually unhealthy situations? Yes, we may want to stay around in hopes that we might influence the church to move in a new, more spiritually healthy direction. But at what price? What happens to us and our families in the process? Is it worth the cost of seeing a child or other family member walk away from all spiritual influences, questioning the God we love?

### **The Local Church is God's Divine Organism for Reaching the World**

Let's assume for the sake of argument that these committed, unchurched Christians are correct and that we and our families might be better off not attending a spiritually unhealthy church. What's the alternative if we really want to experience God and serve our Savior? I firmly believe that abandoning the church altogether for some parachurch ministry is a serious mistake. Scripture is

relatively clear that the church is God's ordained, divine organism to reach out and minister to a lost and dying world. In Matthew 16:18 Jesus says the he will build his church and the gates of hell will not over come it. Bill Hybels is correct when he says that the church is the hope of the world. Thus, abandoning the church altogether isn't a good nor a biblical alternative to this dilemma. It will only cause greater harm long term. Instead, committed Christians should either find a spiritually healthy established church or better become involved in planting such a church.

### **Marketplace Ministries Can Have as Much Impact as Many Churches**

Barna notes that many are becoming involved in some form of parachurch ministry such as a marketplace ministry. I suspect that a spiritually committed business person who has committed his or her business to Christ could have an even greater impact on people (employees and customers) than many if not most of our smaller, struggling churches. That's not to say that we abandon our churches. Again, we need to invest ourselves and our families in spiritually healthy church situations. However, most people who make up our typical church congregations are in powerful positions to have a strong impact on those who don't know Christ in the marketplace. It's imperative that we encourage such people to understand how important they really are to the cause of Christ and to serve the Savior at their businesses.

### **An Announcement**

The Malphurs Group will be offering onsite leadership development and consultant training in the spring. We will meet for five sessions that will take place once a month on Fridays from noon to 6:00 p.m. and Saturday mornings from 8:00 a.m. to noon. This will happen at a hotel near the D/FW Airport. Those who attend may receive seminary credit toward a masters or doctor of ministries degree. If you would like to know more, contact the Malphurs Group ASAP as we begin in February ([aubrey@malphursgroup.com](mailto:aubrey@malphursgroup.com)).

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