

EXTRA! from the Creek

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the Church at Dyers Creek

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This week we're passing along to you
a page from the

CountyCulture Columns

More Loners and Less Social

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Maybe we all should have seen it coming as one of the results of American individualism. The good news is that 72 percent of Americans today claim they've made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that's important in their life; the bad news is that only eighteen percent embrace the idea that their spiritual maturity requires involvement in a church – in a community of faith.

A slight majority – 54 percent – say they're so committed to "having a deeper connection with God" that they would "do whatever it takes to get and maintain that deeper relationship." But adults forty and younger were the least devoted to this level of spiritual growth: less than half – 44 percent – strongly affirmed such a commitment, compared to 58 percent of baby boomers and 63 percent of older adults. And while most contend that they really do want their lives to matter, only a minority – 44 percent – would go so far as to strongly affirm their commitment to "personally make the world and other people's lives better." So it's true. More and more we're seeing even our religious experience on an individual basis rather than something to be shared within a community. We're more loners and less social.

"These figures emphasize how soft people's commitment to God is," explained George Barna, who conducted the study. "Americans are willing to expend some energy in religious activities such as attending church and reading the Bible, and they're willing to throw some money in the offering basket. Because of such activities, they convince themselves that they are people of genuine faith. But when it comes time to truly establishing their priorities and making a tangible commitment to knowing and loving God and to allowing Him to change their character and lifestyle, most people stop short. We want to be

'spiritual' and we want to have God's favor, but we're not sure we want Him taking control of our lives and messing with the image and outcomes we've worked so hard to produce."

Barna pointed out that one of the obvious challenges these figures present to church leaders relates to building a more positive community experience. "It's obvious that most Christians in the United States don't see much value in a communal faith experience. Even though the Bible is unambiguous about the importance of experiencing God through a shared faith journey – and Jesus' example leaves no room for doubt about the significance of involvement in a faith community – Americans remain unconvinced of the necessity of the collective faith experience. This is partially because the typical church model esteems attendance rather than interaction and immersion – partially due to the superficial experiences most believers have had in Sunday school classes or cell groups and partially due to our cultural bias toward independence and fluid relationships. Developing a biblical understanding of the preeminence of community life will take intentional leadership, strategic action, and time."

Sources

George Barna. "Americans Have Commitment Issues, New Survey Shows" (www.barna.org)

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