

10 Reasons Even Committed Christians Are Attending Church Less Often

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It comes up in a surprising number of conversations a lot. And no one's quite sure how to respond to it.

The issue? Even *committed* church attenders are attending church less often.

Sure, the trend has been happening for years (gone are the days when people attended 50 out of 52 Sundays), but the issue has reached a tipping point in the church over the last decade.

I first wrote about this in a post called [7 Ways to Respond as People Attend Church Less Often](#). But the conversation persists and, to many leaders, feels much more urgent.

This isn't a post about why people have *left* the church (that's a different subject.) This is the first in a series of posts about church attenders who love God, appreciate the local church, and are even involved in the local church, but who simply attend less often.

This topic comes up a lot, and some other resources that can help you do a deeper dive include:

- [John Mark Comer on Secular Salvation and Post Christian America \(Episode 316 of my Leadership Podcast\)](#)
- [5 Ways to Embrace Infrequent Church Attenders](#)
- [10 Predictions About the Future Church And Shifting Attendance Patterns](#)

So why all this attention?

This trend isn't going away...in fact (as the podcasts will show) it's accelerating,

It impacts almost every church regardless of size, denomination, or even location.

It probably marks a seismic shift in how the church will do ministry in the future.

Of course, church *attendance* is never the goal. But attendance is a sign of something deeper that every church leader will have to wrestle with over the next few years.

The first key to addressing what's happening is to *understand* what's happening.

So...why are even committed attenders attending less often? There are at least 10 reasons.

1. Greater affluence

Money gives people options.

If your church is at all engaging the middle class, the upper-middle class, or a suburban demographic, an interesting trend is developing. The middle class is shrinking, but as [this New York Times report shows](#), it's shrinking (in part) because more of the middle class is becoming *upper* class.

Both [US](#) and [Canadian](#) personal disposable incomes are at all-time highs.

There are simply more affluent people than there were decades ago, which may in part explain why so many "average" people indulge their obsessions with granite countertops, designer homes, and decent cars, even without being mega-wealthy.

Naturally, this leaves a huge theological void about ministry to and with the poor, but it helps explain what's actually happening in the suburbs and increasingly with the re-urbanization of many cities as the affluent move back downtown. I'm not arguing things *should* be this way. I'm simply showing that this seems to be what's happening.

And again...people with money have options. Technology options. Travel options. Options for their kids. And, arguably, that affluence may be one of the factors moving them further away from a committed engagement with

the mission of the local church. It's perhaps fuelling some of the reasons outlined below.

2. Higher focus on kids' activities

A growing number of kids are playing sports. And a [growing number of kids](#) are playing on teams that require travel.

Many of those sports happen on weekends. And affluent parents are choosing sports over church.

It's as simple as that.

3. More travel

Despite environmental concerns, [travel is on the rise](#), and most people are taking far more than the old standard of one vacation a year.

More and more families of various ages travel for leisure, even if it's just out of town to go camping or to a friend's place for the weekend or a weekend at the lake.

When people are out of town, they tend to not be in church.

4. Blended and single-parent families

Fortunately, more and more blended families and single-parent families are finding a home in church.

So how does this translate into attendance patterns?

Church leaders need to remember that when custody is shared in a family situation, 'perfect' attendance for a kid or teen might be 26 Sundays a year.

Similarly, while the affluent might not be in church because of *access* to reliable transportation, single parents (who, not always, but often, struggle more financially) might not be in church because they *lack access* to reliable transportation.

So here's the strange twist. People who *have* a car are often not in church *because* they have a car. People who *want* to be in church are often *not* in church because they *don't* have a car or because it's not their 'weekend' for church.

Sadly, people who want to get to church simply can't.

By the way, I [used to lead a church](#) that virtually requires a vehicle to get there. I loved how we often see people with reliable transportation helping out those who don't have a vehicle. That's at least a partial remedy to this problem.

5. Online Options

With the rise of online church, social media, and ubiquitous tech, there have never been more opportunities for people to access church without being there.

There are pros and cons to online church and there's no doubt that churches with a strong online presence have seen it impact physical attendance.

But whether or not your church has online options doesn't make the issue go away. Anyone who attends your church has free access to any online ministry of any church.

Online church is here to stay, whether you participate or not.

6. The cultural disappearance of guilt

When I grew up, I felt guilty about not being in church on a Sunday.

The number of people who feel guilty about not being in church on Sunday shrinks daily.

I regularly meet people all the time who haven't been in months but LOVE our church.

If you're relying on guilt as a motivator, you need a new strategy. (Well, honestly, you've always needed a new strategy...)

7. Self-directed spirituality

People are looking less to churches and leaders to help them grow spiritually, and more to other options.

We live in an era in which no parent makes a visit to a doctor's office without having first googled the symptoms of a child's illness and a recommended course of treatment. Just ask any family physician. It drives them nuts. (Google, doctors will tell you, is not a complete replacement for medical school.)

Similarly, when was the last time you bought a car without completely researching it online?

In an age where we have access to everything, more and more people are self-directing their spirituality...for better or for worse.

Similarly, another characteristic of the post-modern mind is a declining trust in and reliance on institutions.

The church in many people's minds is seen as an institution.

I don't actually believe that's what a church is. I think it's a movement...not an institution. But many churches behave like an institution, and the post-modern mind instinctively moves away from it as a result.

8. Failure to see a direct benefit

People always make time for the things they value most. If they're not making time for church, that tells you something.

Even among people who say they love the church and who say they love *your* church, if declining attendance is an issue, chances are it's because they don't see a direct benefit. They don't see the value in being there week after week.

That could be because there isn't much value (gut check). Or it could be because there is a value that they simply don't see.

Either way, failure to see a direct benefit always results in declining engagement.

So what are you doing or not doing that leaves people feeling like there's not that much value?

9. Valuing attendance over engagement

When someone merely *attends* church, the likelihood of showing up regularly or even engaging their faith decreases over time.

At our church, I find our most engaged people—people who serve, give, invite, and who are in a community group—are our most frequent attendees.

More and more as a leader, I value engagement over attendance.

Ironically, if you value attendance over engagement, you will see declining attendance.

10. A massive culture shift

All of these trends witness to something deeper. Our culture is shifting. Seismically.

Church leaders who fail to recognize this will not be able to change rapidly enough to respond to the shifts that are happening.

If you want more on how the culture is shifting, I outlined [15 Characteristics of Unchurched People Today](#) here and outlined [12 Cultural Trends Church Leaders Can't Ignore \(But Might\) in this post](#).

Change is unkind to the unprepared, so prepare.