

## The plight of Christians in Egypt - a threat to religious liberty

By Bill Johnson



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With great concern I've been closely following the brutal attacks upon Egyptian Christians by the Muslim Brotherhood. Many of you may not be aware of the persecution of fellow believers in Egypt because the mainstream media for the most part has turned a blind eye to their plight. May we not do the same.

Truth telling ministries are vital in this day of media sham, misinformation, deception, and deceit. I say that with sadness. Truth tellers are mocked and ridiculed while deceivers fall in step with the politically correct line.

[As Gary Bauer recently reported:](#)

*The chaos that has gripped Cairo since the removal of Muslim Brother President Mohamed Morsi spread throughout Egypt this weekend. The death toll from the violence surged past 800. This morning Islamist militants executed more than two dozen police recruits in the Sinai Peninsula.*

*The headlines have focused on the fighting between the Egyptian military and the Muslim Brotherhood. Virtually ignored is the increasing ferocity of the jihad against Egypt's Christian population. Dozens of churches, Christian businesses, schools and homes have been ransacked and burned.*

*The Christian Science Monitor reports that a mosque in Al Nazla incited violence during morning prayers, telling Muslims, "Your brothers ... are being killed by Jews and*

*Christians." Surely the mosque's leaders knew the charge was false. But the mob was whipped into a frenzy and churches and Christian families were under siege all day long.*

*According to a British media report a Catholic school in the Cairo suburbs was attacked. The cross was ripped from the gate. The classrooms were burned and the nuns were "paraded" through the streets "like prisoners of war." The black flag of Al Qaeda has been raised over numerous churches.*

*Sadly, the western media and Washington's political elites have expressed more concern about the treatment of the Muslim Brotherhood. Members of Congress are demanding that the U.S. suspend aid to the Egyptian government battling the radicals. The Obama Administration is urging the interim government to negotiate with the Muslim Brotherhood, but he has made no demands that the Muslim Brotherhood stop attacking Christians.*

*Meanwhile the king of Saudi Arabia is standing with the Egyptian military against the Muslim Brotherhood. Something is terribly wrong when the president of the United States appears more sympathetic to Muslim extremists than the king of Saudi Arabia. The BBC reported over the weekend that the U.S. foreign policy, reputation and credibility are "in tatters."*

*It's not surprising that media and political elites are silent about the plight of Christians in Egypt. But it is mystifying and heartbreaking that so few pastors find this a worthy topic to discuss from the pulpit.*

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From the desk of Bill Johnson

### We have been blessed to be a blessing!

I am an early riser. More so in recent years. Is it a “getting older” kind of thing? Perhaps. But whatever, I’m enjoying the extra time so very much - a time of peace and quiet to think and to meditate and to get caught up on the news at home and abroad.

I sometimes awaken at 3:30 and get up at 4:00. More often it’s 4:30 or 5:00. It is the best time of the day. I read various devotionals: F.B. Meyer, C.H. Spurgeon, Oswald Chambers, J.C. Ryle and, of course, the Bible.

Every day I sense God’s presence and power in my life. It’s amazing - the quickening and the energy that I receive each and every day. One of the benefits in getting older (I’m 66) is that there is an elevated urgency, an elevated recognition that I’m not middle-aged anymore.

There is an elevated love for my children, my grandchildren, God’s plan and purpose for my life.

In my devotional life, I find different quotes from the various devotionals that I read that grip and stir me - energize me in the Lord. I post them on Facebook each day in the early hours. I know that some people look for them every day for encouragement.

I share this with you that you may be encouraged to spend time with the Lord each and every day. Praying. Seeking His face. Seeking His truth as to what God has to say to you for your edification, challenge, for exhortation.

Here are a few examples of what I’m talking about.

*Faith laughs at that which fear weeps over.  
~ C.H. Spurgeon*

The following words from C.H. Spurgeon inspire as they remind us that as we present our lives to God in humble service that He pours out His grace upon us we give our lives in service.

*Our strength for labour is hidden even from ourselves, until we venture forth to fight the Lord’s battles, or to climb the mountains of difficulty. We do not know what tender sympathies we possess until we try to dry the widow’s tears, and soothe the orphan’s grief. We often find in attempting to teach others, that we gain instruction for ourselves.*

*~ C.H. Spurgeon, Morning by Morning*

Here’s one that touched me so deeply I shared it with Jan and ADA staff. It’s from J.C. Ryle - my mentor from afar and long past. I’m quoting from his book (one of my all time favorites) “Holiness”.

*I believe that far more is done for Christ’s kingdom by the holy living of believers, than we are at all aware of. There is a reality about such living, which makes men feel, and obliges them to think. It carries a weight and influence with it which nothing else can give. It makes religion beautiful, and draws men to consider it, like a lighthouse seen afar off. The day of judgment will prove that many besides husbands have been won “without the Word” by a holy life (1 Peter 3:1). You may talk to people about the doctrines of the gospel — and few will listen, and still fewer understand. But your life is an argument that none can escape! There is a meaning about holiness, which not even the most unlearned can help understanding. They may not understand justification — but they can understand love.*

*~ J.C. Ryle, Holiness*

This, too, is another Ryle. So powerful and practical. Does it touch you? Inspire you?

*We must be holy, because this is the most likely way to do good to others. We cannot live to ourselves only, in this world. Our lives will always be doing either good or harm, to those who see them. They are a silent sermon which all can read. It is sad indeed when they are a sermon for the devil’s cause — and not for God’s. ~J.C. Ryle, Holiness*

But then this from the Bible: Lamentations 3:52-63. I am certain there are Coptic Christians feeding from these very passages in these horrific days.

*“I have been hunted like a bird by those who were my enemies without cause; they flung me alive into the pit and cast stones on me; water closed over my head; I said, ‘I am lost.’ “I called on your name, O Lord, from the depths of the pit; you heard my plea, ‘Do not close your ear to my cry for help!’ You came near when I called on you; you said, ‘Do not fear!’*

*“You have taken up my cause, O Lord; you have redeemed my life. You have seen the wrong done to me, O Lord; judge my cause. You have seen all their vengeance, all their plots against me. “You have heard their taunts, O Lord, all their plots against me. The lips and thoughts of my assailants are against me all the day long. Behold their sitting and their rising; I am the object of their taunts.*

*“You will repay them, O Lord, according to the work of their hands. You will give them dullness of heart; your curse will be on them. You will pursue them in anger and destroy them from under your heavens, O Lord.” Lamentations 3:52-63*

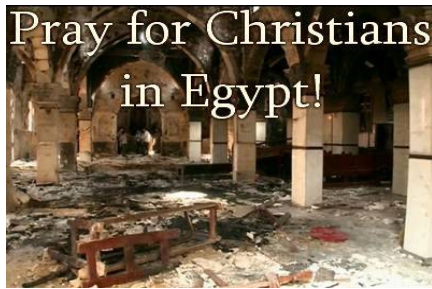
I close with these words: God has incredibly blessed us in America. We have had it so very good.

But how removed are we from going through times like Egypt? Out of the question? As many of you are, I too am uneasy.

In closing, I encourage you to increase the time you spend with the Lord and seek His face on committing yourself to service in His Name. The needs are great right where you are.

May Egypt sober us and may God draw us to pray for our brothers and sisters in Christ.

# The Plight of Christians in Egypt - a threat to religious liberty



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Christianity in Egypt predates Islam by centuries. Egypt's Coptic Church traces its founding to Saint Mark who was martyred in Alexandria. Over the years, I've heard Christian leaders and believers say, "Well, Gary, this is what the Lord promised us would happen." And they stop there.

Yes, Jesus tells us that those who follow him will be persecuted by the world. But it is a theological fallacy to conclude that believers are to be silent in the face of such persecution. The Christian faith also teaches that evil will quicken as we approach the end of history. That fact does not pardon us from our obligation to fight that evil.

If your pastor did not mention the persecution of our Christian brothers and sisters in Egypt this Sunday, I would ask you to respectfully request that he speak up soon. The plight of Christians in Egypt is a reminder that as Islam advances, so too does the threat to religious liberty. Wherever Islam obtains majority status, religious minorities are not only in legal danger, but also in physical danger.

[Breakpoint's John Stonestreet also writes:](#)

"... Christians must be concerned about what is happening to Coptic Christians today.

Since Matthew chapter 2's quoting of Hosea – "out of Egypt I called my son" – Egypt was at the heart of the Christian story ... [a]nd later produced some of the Church's greatest minds: Tertullian, Origen and the great defender of orthodoxy, Athanasius. ...

Many don't realize that Egypt was

Christian for six centuries before the coming of Islam. We call the descendants of those Christians the Copts. For fourteen centuries they and their ancestors have kept the faith even when life would have been easier if they hadn't.

Little has changed. Today, they face what Nina Shea has called a "Jihad." The chaos in Egypt, like the chaos in Iraq and Syria, has made it "open season" on the country's Christian minority. As Shea writes in *National Review* "The [Muslim] Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party has been inciting the anti-Christian pogroms on its web and Facebook pages."

For those unfamiliar with the term, "pogroms" were the anti-Jewish attacks in Tsarist Russia that killed thousands and led to the emigration of millions of Jews to the United States in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The Brotherhood would love to see the Copts do likewise.

If they succeed it will be in part because Christians in the West did nothing. Right now, the mainstream narrative about Egypt depicts the Brotherhood as the victims. It is far more concerned with the impact on Egyptian "democracy" than the fate of Egyptian Christians, or that of any Egyptian that doesn't want to live in a theocracy.

They are not telling the story, so we have to. They are not urging our leaders to protect Egyptian Christians, so we have to. We cannot stand by in silence while yet another ancient Christian community is threatened with extinction.

Of course, that requires understanding that these are ancient Christian communities in the first place. Many American Christians knowledge of church history barely goes back a century. You might say we have evangelical Alzheimer's. Because we are unfamiliar with the past, we are ignorant of our debt to those who went before and their descendants. ...

It's time for us to repay an ancient debt.

Call or email your representative in Congress. Contact your Senators. And the White House. The U.S. must speak out and condemn the targeting and murder of Egyptian Christians. ...

And of course, we must pray for our brothers and sisters in Egypt.

White House comments line:

202-456-1111

White House switchboard:

202-456-1414

United States Capitol switchboard:

202-224-3121.

(A switchboard operator will connect you directly with the office of the Senator/Representative you request.)

Truth teller links on this front:

[www.jihadwatch.org](http://www.jihadwatch.org)

[www.atlssh rugs.com](http://www.atlssh rugs.com)

[www.centerforsecuritypolicy.org](http://www.centerforsecuritypolicy.org)

[www.ouramericanvalues.org](http://www.ouramericanvalues.org)

[www.muslimbrotherhoodinamerica.com](http://www.muslimbrotherhoodinamerica.com)

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## Who am I?

by Chris Johnson



This headline on the Christian Post recently caught my attention, **“Angelina Jolie Advocates Teenage Cohabitation.”** The article states that, *“When Angelina Jolie was 14, her boyfriend was allowed to live with her. The actress plans to raise her children the same way.”*

Hearing this about such a high-profile, famous, and wealthy person brought to mind something that had challenged me during my recent mission trip to Guatemala, though for very different reasons.

Who am I?

In Guatemala, the question was, “who am I to be born into the wealthiest and most comfortable nation in the world to a financially comfortable family that loves me and could afford to send me to school?” Why did the stork drop me off in West Michigan and drop Jorge to a dirty hut surrounded by garbage in Guatemala where he had only a 50% chance of surviving his first 5 years of life?

Have you ever thought about that? Why were you born in the United States and not to a Christian family in Egypt? Maybe your church would have just been burned down, or you would have had friends killed in the protests. Why were we chosen to be comfortable in the United States and not suffering in some third world or oppressed nation?

There’s no human answer to that question.

There’s also no human answer to, “who am I to be born to Bill and Jan Johnson

and to be taught about Jesus and what He wants for me and not to Angelina Jolie who plans to encourage her kids to be sexually active at fourteen? Who am I to be born to my parents and not to the ‘Sister Wives?’ Who am I to be born to a Christian family in West Michigan and not to a militant Muslim family in Egypt?”

I know many of you have had much more difficult lives than I have, and I don’t mean to downplay that, but I’ll bet this is true of most of us. It’s so easy to look at people who don’t know Christ and aren’t living according to His Word and to look down on them for not seeing the truth. As if we ever could have seen it on our own.

Of course, they have personal responsibility for their sin, but we don’t have personal responsibility for our righteousness, and they should be pitied rather than despised.

Angelina and Brad Pitt’s kids will probably never hear God’s plan for sexuality. They will grow up thinking it is completely normal to have a boyfriend or girlfriend share their bed after a study session and then head off for ninth grade together in the morning.

John Bradford is famous partially for coining the phrase, “There, but for the grace of God, go I.”

I think that is the only proper response to the question, “who am I?”



Please take advantage of  
a new match challenge!



By the grace of God and by the generosity of one of God’s faithful servants, we have been blessed and encouraged by a year-end match challenge. It is a challenge that has been offered before and one for which we are so grateful. We often wonder “How are we ever going to make it this year?” Once again, the Lord has faithfully provided!

It’s not an easy challenge as it appeals to individuals who have not given to this ministry for quite awhile to stand with us again. It also challenges those who have given recently to give over and above what they gave last year.

Our anonymous donor has faithfully challenged friends and supporters of ADA to get behind us so that we would be strengthened. We are grateful for the challenge.

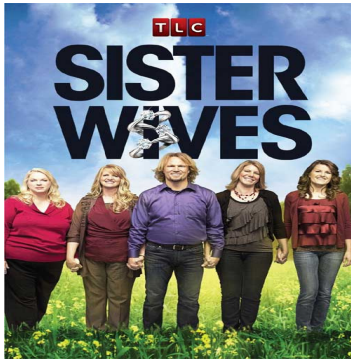
We know that many are struggling to pay their own bills, tithe to their church, and stay afloat financially themselves. However, if you are in a position of being able to stand with us financially, would you please prayerfully consider supporting the work of ADA now and/or in the months ahead to help us meet this important match challenge? Thank you for your prayerful consideration and for doing whatever you can do!

Here are the details of this  
gracious match challenge:

*We will again match new gifts or increased gifts received up to \$15,000 that ADA receives between 9/1/13 and 12/31/13. A new gift is anyone who has not given since 12/31/11. An increased gift is the incremental gift given over last year as long as it was given after 9/1. E.g. Joe gave \$1,000 in 2012. He gave \$1200 in 7/2013 and \$500 in 9/13-\$500 would qualify as increased gift.*

# The Danger of “Sister Wives”

By Lisa Van Houten



What is the danger of “Sister Wives?” Why do we continue to oppose it? Is it a reach to claim that this show is causing people to accept polygamy— just as LGBT forces are doing in regards to same-sex “marriage”?

I wrote the following nearly three years ago during the first season of “Sister Wives.”

*Sunday night the TLC network aired the continuing saga of “Sister Wives,” the reality show documenting the lives of a polygamist family that attempts to portray polygamy as “just like any other American family.”*

*Each week as I’ve reviewed this program I’ve felt a plethora of emotions—repulsion, pity, outrage, anger. Usually outrage tops the list. I find myself verbally expressing my ire and indignation to the screen, debating their warped justifications for polygamy as they claim how ‘wonderful’ it is. I get angry as I hear the rationalized statements about their “lifestyle choice,” the attempts to legitimize the notion that ‘marriage can be anything we want it to be.’ And what makes this indoctrination even more dangerous is the fact that the messages are couched by the sweetly portrayed, seemingly carefree family.*

As I stated, those comments above were written nearly three years ago. As I monitored the most recent episode of “Sister Wives,” I wondered if I have the same outrage as I did when this show premiered. Have I, in any way, become “used to” polygamy?

That is the danger of “Sister Wives.” Getting used to immorality. Turning a blind eye and tolerating – if not accepting – that

which goes against God’s Word and His design. Thankfully, I can honestly say the show still repulses and angers me, but how about the millions of viewers who watch it for entertainment? Have their views on polygamy changed as they watch week after week? As with gay “marriage,” will the American people begin to tolerate that which was repugnant not that long ago?

The daughter of another polygamist family recently won a college scholarship from the American Civil Liberties Union [ACLU] for her essay in support of polygamy.

The polygamists’ daughter wrote in her award-winning essay:

*“... I believe we deserve civil liberties like everyone else. I have also come through this experience to see how important our constitutional liberties for all Americans whether I agree with them or not. ...*

*In the same way that there is more tolerance towards the gay and lesbian culture, and other controversial ways of living that are becoming more acceptable—we wish for that same right one day. Those living a polygamous lifestyle are often viewed as abnormal or different, even abusive. All we seek is tolerance. I don’t expect everyone to agree with the polygamous lifestyle, just to allow people the right to have that choice in their life, without fear of persecution or prosecution. ...”*

“All we seek is tolerance.” On the surface it sounds so reasonable. However “tolerating” sin sounds a lot like those lukewarm Christians that God said He would spew out of His mouth.

It’s not “persecution” to oppose that which God opposes. The danger of “Sister Wives” is that it does promote polygamy and in so doing undermines marriage and family as designed by God.

J.C. Ryle, the great 19th century theologian, wrote: ***“Holiness is the habit of being of one mind with God, according as we find His mind described in Scripture. It is***

***the habit of agreeing in God’s judgment - hating what He hates - loving what He loves - and measuring everything in this world by the standard of His Word. He who most entirely agrees with God, he is the most holy man.”***

Loving what God loves and hating what he hates makes it pretty clear what our view should be about “tolerating” polygamy.

I don’t know about you, but I desire to strive for holiness – “measuring everything in this world by the standard of His Word.” I pray I never become complacent and accepting of what God hates – including polygamy.

Please stand with us in holding accountable the corporations empowering the legitimization of polygamy through “Sister Wives.”

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# Have it your way - Pleasing self or God?

by Lisa Van Houten



“Why Millennials Are Leaving the Church” is the title of an opinion article gone viral, written by Christian author Rachel Held Evans and published on CNN’s Belief Blog.

This question has plagued the modern church causing knee-jerk reactions to entice 20-somethings to stay in, return to, or visit our churches. And so we’ve turned to people-pleasing measures to draw them in. Starbucks coffee, cushy furniture, a hip praise band, a coffee house setting. Casual clothes, casual atmosphere, casual preaching. Well, perhaps preaching is too strong of a word – rather “meditations” interspersed with witty video clips and flashy power points would be a more apt description of the sermons delivered from many of today’s pulpits. Actually not pulpits, either – rather, bar stools on center stage.

Are any of these things “wrong,” per se? No, however I found it interesting to read the take on such changes from the 32-year-old author of the article reference above.

*“... Time and again, the assumption among Christian leaders, and evangelical leaders in particular, is that the key to drawing twenty-somethings back to church is simply to make a few style updates – edgier music, more casual services, a coffee shop in the fellowship hall, a pastor who wears skinny jeans, an updated Web site that includes online giving.*

*“But here’s the thing: Having been advertised to our whole lives, we millennials have highly sensitive BS meters, and we’re not easily impressed with consumerism or performances.*

*“In fact, I would argue that church-as-performance is just one more thing driving us away from the church, and evangelicalism in particular. ...”*

So if not coffee, music, and jeans – what does this author think young adults are looking for in church? As she speaks to evangelical leaders on this issue, she offers her perspective:

*“... I explain how young adults perceive evangelical Christianity to be too political, too exclusive, old-fashioned, unconcerned with social justice and hostile to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.*

*“I point to research that shows young evangelicals often feel they have to choose between their intellectual integrity and their faith, between science and Christianity, between compassion and holiness.*

*“I talk about how the evangelical obsession with sex can make Christian living seem like little more than sticking to a list of rules, and how millennials long for faith communities in which they are safe asking tough questions and wrestling with doubt. ...*

*“What millennials really want from the church is not a change in style but a change in substance.*

*“We want an end to the culture wars. We want a truce between science and faith. We want to be known for what we stand for, not what we are against.*

*“We want to ask questions that don’t have predetermined answers.*

*“We want churches that emphasize an allegiance to the kingdom of God over an allegiance to a single political party or a single nation.*

*“We want our LGBT friends to feel truly welcome in our faith communities.*

*“We want to be challenged to live lives of holiness, not only when it comes to sex, but*

*also when it comes to living simply, caring for the poor and oppressed, pursuing reconciliation, engaging in creation care and becoming peacemakers. ...”*

<http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2013/07/27/why-millennials-are-leaving-the-church/>

After reading her conclusions, there is a point or two – actually several – on which I disagree with the author’s solutions for keeping young adults from leaving the church.

First of all, to say that the evangelical church is “too political” or aligned with a single political party is truly naïve. If that were the case why do exit polls election after election show a disconnect between evangelical Christians and the values guiding their votes? Why do so few evangelicals even go to the polls? A recent survey from the Center for the Study of American Culture and Faith found that less than half (only 44%) of theologically conservative pastors would definitely provide strong encouragement to their congregations to vote in next year’s elections.

[Gary Bauer comments on that statistic:](#)

*“Unfortunately, it has been my experience that when you ask many pastors, even those who generally share our worldview, about the importance of civic responsibility, they often respond by saying, “My job is to preach the Gospel.” But if you ask them about the silence of many churches in slave states during the 1850s, they will shake their heads in disgust.*

*“President Lincoln worried about pastors who told him that slavery was a political issue. And when he discussed slavery in the public square, Lincoln was often told to keep his religion to himself.*

*“Too many churches were silent in Germany during the 1930s. And when some brave souls like Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Martin Niemoeller dared to speak*

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# Have it your way - Pleasing self or God?

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*up, Hitler told them to take care of their churches and leave Germany to him.*

*“This country was founded by pilgrims seeking religious liberty. It has a tremendous religious heritage. Religious liberty was so important to our Founding Fathers that they listed it in the first amendment to the Constitution.*

*“But when so many pastors are sitting silently on the sidelines of the culture war, we risk losing those first freedoms while America is fundamentally transformed into something our Founders would not recognize.”*

Which brings me to another point of contention I have with the author’s claim of what millennials want in church – an “end to the culture wars” and a “truce between science and faith.” In other words, sticking our heads in the sand and not speaking the Truth of God’s Word into a culture that desperately needs it. Shall we look the other way when millions of unborn babies are killed, or should we defend these tiny image-bearers who – like us – are fearfully and wonderfully made? Should we remain quiet when our schools teach our children that they are random products of evolution when all creation shouts the existence of our Creator – even our own bodies made up of an amazing design, including an actual language found in our incredibly complex DNA?

And while we should reach out to the LGBT community with the salvation message and the love of Christ, should we accept the sin along with the sinner, turning a blind eye

to a sin that God calls an abomination, one that in Romans 1 He says will lead to the “due penalty for their error”?

*“Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”* I Corinthians 6:9-11

What those practicing lesbianism, homosexuality, bi-sexuality, and transgenderism need is not just to feel ‘truly welcomed’; they need to be washed, sanctified, justified - as we have been, by the grace of God. Many of us can find ourselves in that list of “and such were some of you.” We don’t need our sin accepted, we need to be saved from it. Namely we need the Savior.

Which is the major point on which the author and I agree: our need for Jesus.

However, I do have one final observation on this author’s listing of what millennials want in a worship service in order to keep them from leaving the Church. Go back to page 6 and notice the pronouns which begin nearly every paragraph in the article highlighted. Nearly all begin with “I” or “We.” We want, we want, we want.

However, another young author, Brett McCracken, has a different take on what millennials need. He writes: *“As a Millennial, if I’m truly honest with myself, what I really need from the church is not another yes-man entity enabling my hubris and giving me what I want. Rather, what I need is something bigger than me, older than me, bound by a truth that transcends me and a story that will outlast me; basically, something that doesn’t change to fit me and my whims, but changes me to be the Christ-like person I was created to be.”*

As a final thought, is there someone we’re leaving out in this discussion of worship? As Christians we are called to go out and make disciples, but when we go in to a church worship service, what should be our primary purpose? Is it to please self or God? Are we primarily there to have our wants met or to worship and glorify the Lord? If worship is the primary purpose for a “worship” service, have we sought from God what He expects from us – how He wants to be worshipped?

We have quite an exalted view of ourselves when we seek to please ourselves in a church service designed to worship the Lord God Almighty. Perhaps the reason millennials are leaving many of America’s churches is because true reverence and worship of a Holy and Righteous God is no longer central – instead, pleasing ourselves is.

*“This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.”*  
Matthew 15:8-9

Our July 26 summer conference was a tremendous blessing to many and to us at ADA, too, as many had their eyes opened to new realities and to see our great need for God and His continued mercy and grace. We seek your prayers as we desire to advance our outreach with upcoming conferences to be scheduled and promoted. Pray for us as we seek to make available individuals to inform, encourage, exhort and stir! We encourage you to get on our daily email list and our facebook page which often gives updates and shares spiritual encouragements every day. For more information please contact Kimberly at 1-888-733-2326 or [kimberly@americandecency.org](mailto:kimberly@americandecency.org).

## 3 Common Traits of Youth Who Don't Leave the Church



The previous article discusses millennials leaving the church. But what about those who don't leave the church? We came across this insightful commentary by Jon Nielson, senior high pastor at College Church in Wheaton, Illinois, which explores what sets apart these youth.

### 3 Common Traits of Youth Who Don't Leave the Church

"What do we do about our kids?" The group of parents sat together in my office, wiping their eyes. I'm a high school pastor, but for once, they weren't talking about 16-year-olds drinking and partying. Each had a story to tell about a "good Christian" child, raised in their home and in our church, who had walked away from the faith during the college years. These children had come through our church's youth program, gone on short-term mission trips, and served in several different ministries during their teenage years. Now they didn't want anything to do with it anymore. ...

There is no one easy solution for bringing all of those "lost" kids back into the church, other than continuing to pray for them and speaking the gospel into their lives. However, we can all look at the 20-somethings in our churches who are engaged and involved in ministry. What is it that sets apart the kids who stay in the church? Here are just a few observations I have made about such kids, with a few applications for those of us serving in youth ministry.

#### 1. They are converted.

... We need to stop talking about "good kids." We need to stop being pleased with attendance at youth group and fun retreats. We need to start getting on our knees and praying that the Holy Spirit will do miracu-

lous saving work in the hearts of our students as the Word of God speaks to them. In short, we need to get back to a focus on conversion. How many of us are preaching to "unconverted evangelicals"? Youth pastors, we need to preach, teach, and talk—all the while praying fervently for the miraculous work of regeneration to occur in the hearts and souls of our students by the power of the Holy Spirit! When that happens—when the "old goes" and the "new comes"—it will not be iffy. We will not be dealing with a group of "nominal Christians." We will be ready to teach, disciple, and equip a generation of future church leaders—"new creations"—who are hungry to know and speak God's Word. It is converted students who go on to love Jesus and serve the church.

#### 2. They have been equipped, not entertained.

... [Y]outh pastors especially need to keep repeating the words of Ephesians 4:11-12 to themselves: "[Christ] gave...the teachers to equip the saints for the work of the ministry, for building up the body of Christ." Christ gives us—teachers—to the church, not for entertainment, encouragement, examples, or even friendship primarily. He gives us to the church to "equip" the saints to do gospel ministry in order that the church of Christ may be built up.

If I have not equipped the students in my ministry to share the gospel, disciple a younger believer, and lead a Bible study, then I have not fulfilled my calling to them, no matter how good my sermons have been. We pray for conversion; that is all we can do, for it is entirely a gracious gift of God. But after conversion, it is our Christ-given duty to help fan into flame a faith that serves, leads, teaches, and grows. If our students leave high school without Bible-reading habits, Bible-study skills, and strong examples of discipleship and prayer, we have lost them. We have entertained, not equipped them...and it may indeed be time to panic!

... We don't need youth group junkies; we need to be growing churchmen and churchwomen who are equipped to teach, lead, and serve. ...

#### 3. Their parents preached the gospel to them.

... It is impossible for me to bring conversion, of course, but it is also impossible for me to have an equipping ministry that sends out vibrant churchmen and churchwomen if my ministry is not being reinforced tenfold in the students' homes. The common thread that binds together almost every ministry-minded 20-something that I know is abundantly clear: a home where the gospel was not peripheral but absolutely central. The 20-somethings who are serving, leading, and driving the ministries at our church were kids whose parents made them go to church. They are kids whose parents punished them and held them accountable when they were rebellious. They are kids whose parents read the Bible around the dinner table every night. And they are kids whose parents were tough but who ultimately operated from a framework of grace that held up the cross of Jesus as the basis for peace with God and forgiveness toward one another.

This is not a formula! Kids from wonderful gospel-centered homes leave the church; people from messed-up family backgrounds find eternal life in Jesus and have beautiful marriages and families. But it's also not a crapshoot. In general, children who are led in their faith during their growing-up years by parents who love Jesus vibrantly, serve their church actively, and saturate their home with the gospel completely, grow up to love Jesus and the church. The words of Proverbs 22:6 do not constitute a formula that is true 100 percent of the time, but they do provide us with a principle that comes from the gracious plan of God, the God who delights to see his gracious Word passed from generation to generation: "Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it."

Youth pastors, pray with all your might for true conversion; that is God's work. Equip the saints for the work of the ministry; that is your work. Parents, preach the gospel and live the gospel for your children; our work depends on you.

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