



Pulse Check

Top Ten Research Findings For Pastors

ISSUE 1

THRIVING
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Did you know that Focus on the Family has a ministry just for pastors and church leaders?

You have a unique role to fulfill and our desire is to equip you and your church families with the tools and resources you need to thrive in today's culture. We have resources specifically designed for pastors as well as programs and free tools for ministry staff and lay leaders. Visit us online for your one-stop shop to all Focus on the Family has to offer.

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Top Ten Research Findings For Pastors

Categories



PASTORAL WISDOM

So much to read, so little time. Pastors tell us they simply don't have enough time to read all of the great books, articles, and blogs they'd like to. Our team here at Focus on the Family combs through the most helpful pastoral resources and offers clear, concise summaries. You'll love the condensed pastoral wisdom we're providing in this section.



RESEARCH NOTES

Our research team diligently studies family trends and today's culture. These short write-ups will keep you informed on what's going on in our society and within American families. We'll help you understand the families under your care so you can minister to them with wisdom.



SERMON NUGGETS

Great pastors know the power of a great illustration, but sometimes illustrations can be misleading. In this section, we provide well-researched illustrations and statistics you can give your people with confidence. Let sermon nuggets help you build your next great sermon.



STAFF MEETING

We know you meet with your staff frequently, so in this section we provide relevant information and research concerning the culture and family to keep you and your staff up to date. This part of the Pulse Check is a great way to kick-off every staff meeting.



STUFF YOU SHOULD KNOW

Let's face it, there's stuff out there that you should know! Our team at Focus on the Family works hard to keep abreast of issues in society that affect our ministry to families and churches. From giving habits to effective ways to reach out to Millennials, we're on top of it and we want you to know this stuff too!



Pastoral Wisdom

10. HADDON ROBINSON'S CORE CONVICTIONS OF BIBLICAL PREACHING

Haddon Robinson, the Harold John Ockenga Distinguished Professor of Preaching at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary has compiled this list of truths biblical ministers must be committed to:

1. The Bible is the Word of God

As Augustine put it, "When the Bible speaks, God speaks." This is the conviction that if I can really understand a passage in its context, then what I know is what God wants to say. (I don't believe that many evangelicals as well as liberals really believe this.)

2. The entire Bible is the Word of God

Not only Romans but Leviticus, not only Ephesians but Esther. Not merely the "hot" passages but the cold ones.

3. The Bible is self-authenticating

If I can really understand a passage in its context, then what I know is what God wants to say.

If people can be exposed to an understanding of the Scriptures on a regular basis, then they do not need arguments about the veracity of Scripture. Therefore, a listener or reader doesn't have to buy into the first two commitments before God can work in a person's life through his Word.

4. This leads to a "Thus saith the Lord" approach to preaching

I'm not referring to a homiletical method here, but a desire to open up the Scriptures so that the authority of the message rests on the Bible. (This works against the anti-authoritarian spirit of our society.)

5. The student of the Bible must try to get at the intent of the biblical writer

The first questions are "What did the biblical writer want to say to the biblical reader? Why?" The Reader Response theory embraced by many literary scholars today will not work for the study of the Bible. Simply put, "The Bible cannot mean what it has not meant."

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Pastoral Wisdom

6. The Bible is a book about God

It is not a religious book of advice about the "answers" we need about a happy marriage, sex, work, or losing weight. Although the Scriptures reflect on many of those issues, they are above all about who God is and what God thinks and wills. I understand reality only if I have an appreciation for who he is and what he desires for his creation and from his creation.

7. We don't "make the Bible relevant"; we show its relevance

Truth is as relevant as water to thirst or food to hunger. Modern advertising creates needs that don't really exist to move the merchandise.



Research Notes

9. YOUNG ADULTS CONSISTENTLY EXPRESS MARRIAGE AND FAMILY AS IMPORTANT LIFE GOAL

By Glenn T. Stanton

Cohabitation and unmarried child-bearing by women in their 20s and 30s have been the huge growth areas in family formation over the past ten years in Western nations, and marriage rates continue to plummet. But how is marriage faring in terms of young people's attitudes and life dreams?

Here are what researchers are finding:

- A)** Child Trends, a non-partisan research firm in Washington DC, released a July 2009 report revealing that 83% of young adults say that being married someday is a "very important" or "important" life goal.

- B)** Initial findings from the World Family Map Project, a cooperative research project between the Institute of Marriage and Family Canada, University of Virginia and Child Trends found that over three quarters of the world's adults believe marriage is an important and relevant institution. 2

- C)** An MTV/Associated Press survey received a great deal of media attention two years ago for its seemingly surprising findings that young people said their families were their primary source of happiness, followed by spending time with friends or a significant other. Nearly no one mentioned money as a source of happiness. And regarding their view of sexual relationships, the young people that were sexually active said it actually "leads to less happiness" according to 13 to 17 year-olds and 18 to 24 year-olds said it leads to "more happiness in the moment, but not in general."

- D)** The London School of Economics reported a top life-desire for young adults in the UK was for a happy marriage and family, with almost a third of women citing it as their childhood dream. Nearly one in five men said it was their top choice as well.

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Research Notes

- E)** Since 1976, the nationally representative Monitoring the Future survey has been tracking the attitudes of high school students on a host of life-course topics. They found that 82 percent of high school girls and 70 percent of boys indicated that having a good marriage and family life was "extremely important" to them in 2005.
- F)** The Institute for Social Research and the University of Michigan conducted a survey examining four decades of family attitude trends in the U.S., drawing from five large scale, nationally representative data sets. They report that for all the change seen in social values and family trends, "there is very little evidence that the commitment of Americans to children, marriage and family life has eroded substantially in the past two decades."

Their article's conclusion is pointed:

A very important (constant finding) to note is the strong emphasis and commitment given to marriage, children and family life in America today. Both young and old Americans place great emphasis on marriage and children and plan to devote much of their lives to children and spouses. This can be seen in the overwhelming importance that young people place on the significance of a good marriage and family life.

Read the entire article here: <http://bit.ly/1ljKCq4>



Pastoral Wisdom

8. JOHN STOTT'S STEPS FOR PREPARING A SERMON

Joshua Harris has compiled a great summary from John Stott's book on preaching *Between Two Worlds*. Stott offers several great steps we should remember as we prepare to preach to our people. See Harris' entire summary here: <http://bit.ly/K7YNmh>

1. Choose your text and meditate on it.
2. Ask questions of the text.
3. Combine diligent study with fervent prayer.
4. Isolate the Dominant Thought of the Text.
5. Arrange Your Material to Serve the Dominant Thought
6. Remember the Power of Imagination--Illustrate!
7. Add Your Introduction
8. Add Your Conclusion.
9. Write Down Your Sermon
10. Edit it Again
11. Pray over Your Message



Staff Meeting

7. THE SPIRITUALITY OF CHURCH GOERS IN AMERICA

New research from LifeWay Research suggests many churchgoers are not open about their faith. In a survey of 2,930 American Protestant churchgoers, Ed Stetzer and his team found:

- 29% agreed with the statement: “Spiritual matters do not tend to come up as a normal part of my daily conversations with Christians” (50% disagreed).
- 24% disagreed with the statement: “I openly share about difficulties I’m experiencing when I talk with Christian friends” (57% agreed).
- 14% agreed with the statement: “Many people who know me are not aware I am a Christian” (72% disagreed).
- 14% disagreed with the statement: “A Christian should obtain honest feedback about his/her spiritual life from other Christians” (14% disagreed).

LifeWay Research Director Scott McConnell said, “It is easy for Christians to put their ‘church’ face on at church and pretend everything is fine, but without transparent interaction among followers of Christ, blind spots are left unattended and opportunities for change are unsupported.”

Source: <http://lfwyr.com/19seCQQ>



Pastoral Wisdom

6. DIETRICH BONHOEFFER ON LISTENING

The first service that one owes to others in the fellowship consists in listening to them. Just as love to God begins with listening to His Word, so the beginning of love for brethren is learning to listen to them. It is God's love for us that He not only gives us His Word but also lends us His ear. So it is His work that we do for our brother when we learn to listen to him. Christians, especially ministers, so often think they must always contribute something when they are in the company of others, that this is the one service they have to render. They forget that listening can be a greater service than speaking. Many people are looking for an ear that will listen. They do not find it among Christians, because these Christians are talking when they should be listening. (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 97-98)



Sermon Nuggets

5. EXCELLENT EXCERPTS ON HEAVEN

"I bear my testimony that there is no joy to be found in all this world like that of sweet communion with Christ. I would barter all else there is of heaven for that. Indeed, that is heaven. As for the harps of gold and the streets like clear glass and the songs of seraphs and the shouts of the redeemed, one could very well give all these up, counting them as a drop in a bucket, if we might forever live in fellowship and communion with Jesus." (Charles Haddon Spurgeon)

"One of the greatest joys of heaven will be the exalted sounds of perfected souls singing their praises to God. The best most beautiful and most perfect way that we have of expressing a sweet concord of mind is by music." (Jonathan Edwards)

"If God contains the fullness of all good things in himself like an inexhaustible fountain, nothing beyond him is to be sought by those who strive for the highest good and all the elements of happiness." (John Calvin)

"When we shall come home, and enter into the possession of our Brother's fair kingdom, and when our heads shall find the weight of the eternal crown of glory, then we shall look back to pains and sufferings and then we will see life and sorrow to be less than one step or stride from a prison to glory. Our little inch of time-suffering is not worthy of our first night's welcome-home to heaven." (Samuel Rutherford)

"How sweet is rest after fatigue! How sweet will heaven be when our journey is ended." (George Whitefield)

We are...saplings here, but we shall be transported into our heavenly soil to grow in God's light. Here our abilities are in blossom; there they shall burst forth with fruits of greater beauty. Our death is but the passing from one degree of loving service to another; the difference is like that of the unborn child and the one who has entered into the experiences of a new life. Our love for God will continue, but awakened with new purity and purposefulness. (Erwin Lutzer)



Research Notes

4. WHO IS REALLY LEAVING THE FAITH AND WHY?

By Andrew Hess

It's likely you've heard the news: the sky is falling. Reports have been circulating for a while now that our churches are on the decline and it's the young people who are to blame. Articles, blogs and even books have been written warning ministry leaders and parents alike, the Millennials are leaving our churches in droves of hundreds and thousands.

Intrigued by the implications of a generation giving up on organized religion, we set out to understand who is leaving and why. And what we found was surprising. Many of the most significant and encouraging findings are largely being ignored, while the less accurate and discouraging ones are being emphasized.

We talked to respected sociologists of religion and studied the best, nationally-representative studies and found the bad news is not as bad as you might have heard. Our new report, "Millennial Religious Participation and Retention" draws out some very important research for those who are raising and ministering to the next generation.

Pew Research recently found that 18% of young adults leaving their faith altogether and another 20% are switching from one faith to another. This latter cohort, while leaving individual churches, are not leaving their individual faith. They might be switching to a church across town or to one near their college campus. With more young adults switching than leaving, it's odd very few are talking about those switching. In fact, many, we suspect, have been counting them along with those who are leaving.

Also interesting is the huge difference between conservative, Bible-teaching churches and mainline Protestant churches. The General Social Survey, perhaps the most academically-trusted source for demographic data back through 1972, recently noted a 2.2% decline in mainline churches and a slight 0.6% increase among conservative churches (from 1991 to 2012).

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Research Notes

Perhaps most interesting is what Pew learned about those leaving their faith. Pew asked those leaving if they ever had a strong faith as a child. Only 11% said they did. The other 89% said they never had a strong faith in the first place. As our report says:

“Not surprisingly, homes modeling lukewarm faith do not create enduring faith in children. Homes modeling vibrant faith do. So these young adults are leaving something they never had a good grasp of in the first place. This is not a crisis of faith, per se, but of parenting.”

Young adults are not developing a strong faith as children and walking away as they enter adulthood. Instead, the majority are failing to develop strong faith in the first place and then walking away. As Notre Dame Sociology Professor Christian Smith writes,

Religious outcomes in emerging adulthood ... flow quite predictably from formative religious influences that shape persons' lives in early years ... religious commitments, practices and investments made during childhood and the teenage years, by parents and others in families and religious communities, matter – they make a difference.

This has huge implications for those working to instill faith in our children. First, it's encouraging that those children who develop a deep faith early on will likely hold onto that faith throughout their lives. But secondly, this shows being in and around church is simply insufficient to develop strong faith for many children. Taking children to church and Sunday school, while important, should not be seen as the only, or even best, way to instill strong faith in our children.

Parents should be intentional about creating homes where their children learn a vibrant faith from God-fearing parents, relatives and other adults. Parents should teach personal habits of prayer and Bible reading in their children, which makes them much more likely to hold onto their faith.

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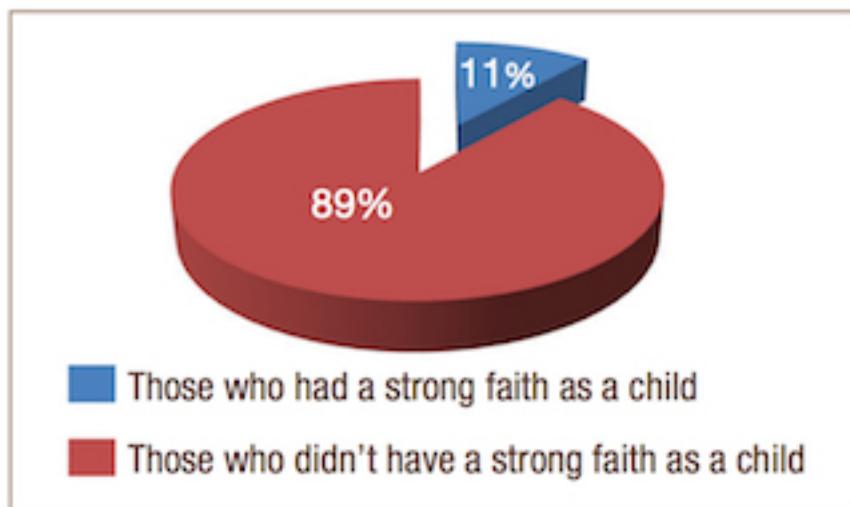
Research Notes

Christian Smith doesn't mince words: "Parents are huge, absolutely huge, nearly a necessary condition" for a child to remain strong in their faith into young adulthood. He concludes "without question, the most important pastor a child will ever have in their life is a parent."

There are many reasons why young adults leave their faith, but perhaps the most significant is that they never developed a strong faith in the first place. Instead of trying to appeal to those with lukewarm faith, perhaps we should back up and consider how we can teach parents to cultivate strong, lasting faith long before our children enter adulthood.

For more of our findings, read the complete report at Focus Findings, a ministry of Focus on the Family: <http://bit.ly/1kKE9v5>

Young Adults Who Leave the Faith





Staff Meeting

3. WISDOM FOR MINISTRY FROM DALLAS WILLARD

On May 9, 2013, Christian thought leader and author Dallas Willard passed away. Here are a few excerpts from some of his most beloved writings:

"I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live life if he were I. I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner in which he did all that he did." (Article: "How To Be a Disciple")

"Memorizing the scriptures is more important than a daily quiet time, for as we fill our minds with these great passages and have them available for our meditation, quiet time takes over the entirety of our lives" (*The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus's Essential Teachings on Discipleship*)

"Grace is not opposed to effort, it is opposed to earning. Earning is an attitude. Effort is an action. Grace, you know, does not just have to do with forgiveness of sins alone." (*The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus's Essential Teachings on Discipleship*)

"The word 'disciple' occurs 269 times in the New Testament. 'Christian' is found only three times and was first introduced to refer precisely to the disciples.... The New Testament is a book about disciples, by disciples, and for disciples of Jesus Christ." (*The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus's Essential Teachings on Discipleship*)

"We must understand that God does not "love" us without liking us - through gritted teeth - as "Christian" love is sometimes thought to do. Rather, out of the eternal freshness of his perpetually self-renewed being, the heavenly Father cherishes the earth and each human being upon it. The fondness, the endearment, the unstintingly affectionate regard of God toward all his creatures is the natural outflow of what he is to the core - which we vainly try to capture with our tired but indispensable old word "love"." (*The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life In God*)

"Any friend of Jesus is far better off dead." (*The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus's Essential Teachings on Discipleship*)



Stuff You Should Know

2. NEW FINDINGS ON MENTAL ILLNESS IN THE CHURCH

Lifeway Research recently reported the following statistics on mental illness:

A third of Americans – and nearly half of evangelical, fundamentalist, or born-again Christians – believe prayer and Bible study alone can overcome serious mental illness. The survey also found most Americans (68 percent) would feel welcome in church if they were mentally ill.

Thirty-five percent agree with the statement, "With just Bible study and prayer, ALONE, people with serious mental illness like depression, bipolar disorder, and schizophrenia could overcome mental illness."

Fifty percent of those 18-29 years old say prayer and Bible study could overcome mental illness. That number falls to less than 30 percent for those 55-64.

Evangelical, fundamentalist, or born-again Christians (48 percent) agree prayer and Scripture study alone can overcome mental illness. Only 27 percent of other Americans agree.

Just over half (51 percent) say someone close to them has experienced mental illness. That number drops to 37 percent for those over 65.

Fifty-four percent of Americans say churches should do more to prevent suicide. That number jumps to 64 percent among evangelical, fundamentalist or born-again Christians. Americans who never attend church services are the least likely to agree that churches welcome those with mental illness. Those who attend weekly see churches as welcoming.

Source: <http://bit.ly/1c9WFAM>



Pastoral Wisdom

1. CHARLES HADDON SPURGEON ON THE MOST IMPORTANT THING PASTORS DO

“Of all I would wish to say this is the sum; my brethren, PREACH CHRIST, always and evermore. He is the whole gospel. His person, offices, and work must be our one great, all-comprehending theme. The world needs still to be told of its Saviour, and of the way to reach him ... We are not called to proclaim philosophy and metaphysics, but the simple gospel. Man’s fall, his need of a new birth, forgiveness through an atonement, and salvation as the result of faith, these are our battle-axe and weapons of war.” (*Lectures to My Students*, pp.87-88)

Resources

www.ThrivingPastor.com

- Ministry Tools (church kits, family and church health assessments, free resources)
- Pulse Check (cultural research to keep you up to date on pertinent family issues)
- Marriage resources and programs
- Parenting resources and programs
- Culture and community events
- Advocacy awareness and involvement
- Caregiving retreats
- Benevolent resources
- Christian counseling referral network

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