

# Religious Nones

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What is the fastest growing religious group in America? Let's see.

In the High Middle Ages, theology was called "The Queen of the Sciences" and was the capstone of study at the European universities.

The Enlightenment--also known as The Age of Reason--was a movement that dominated Europe between 1715 and 1789. Some of the more well-known figures were Voltaire, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, David Hume, and Immanuel Kant. Science played a major role in The Enlightenment and one of its main objectives was to overthrow religion in favor of free thought. God was no longer needed as the source of all morality; instead morality and values could be determined by philosophy and science. In our quest to better understand the world we dumped God in order to pursue these "why" and "meaning" questions using science. We had removed God because we realized that He was no longer necessary.

Between 1883 and 1885 Friedrich Nietzsche wrote a book entitled "Thus Spoke Zarathustra." Does anyone know the famous phrase that came from this book? "God is dead."

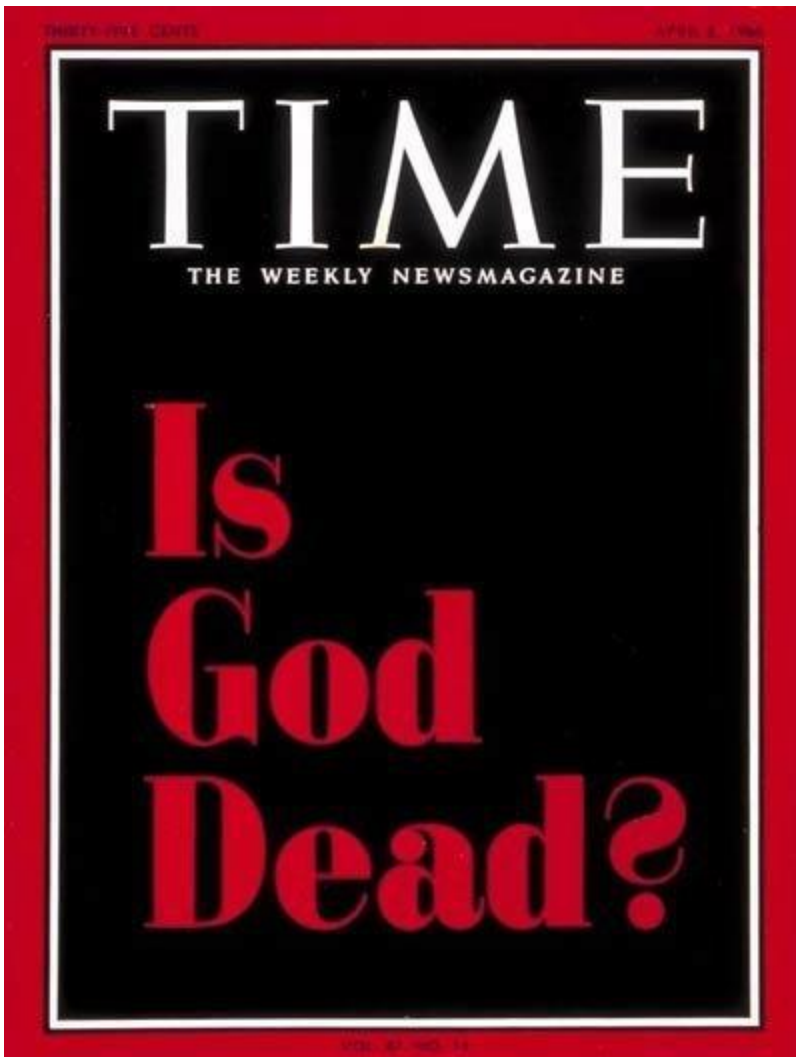
This concept was first articulated in Nietzsche's book "The Gay Science."

God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers? What was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood off us? What water is there for us to clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it?

By this Nietzsche did not mean that God actually was murdered and so ceased to exist. Rather, he meant that our concept of God was no longer needed. The world could live and prosper without people referring to God.

With the constrictions of religion gone we could create a new worldview and perspective based on philosophy and science. But even Nietzsche realized that this came with risks with perhaps the greatest being that people would despair of meaninglessness.

Then on April 8, 1966 TIME magazine's cover asked the question: "Is God Dead?"



This cover and article became a key icon in America's growing culture of unbelief. What also contributed to its impact and controversy was that the issue was published on the eve of Easter and Passover. This cover brought the people who were hidden atheists, agnostics, and non-religious out into society. It forced society to open up conversations of people losing their religion and feeling OK about that.

Do we need God?

## 1 Definitions

### Atheism

A definition from the Pew Research Center, "An atheist is someone who does not believe in God."

Atheists have complete surety that there is no God and no afterlife, and therefore no need for a Savior. There are several different thoughts among atheists on the person of Jesus—ranging from Him being a historical figure to never existing.

### Agnosticism

From the Pew Research Center, "An agnostic is someone who is unsure whether God exists."

By claiming agnosticism, a person admits that the existence of God is impossible to prove or disprove. Their perspective on life is based on intellect, knowledge, and certifiable proof. Often they acknowledge the potential for a higher power at work in the world, but since God’s existence cannot be proven through experimentation, they do not hold to the teachings of a specific religion.

Of the Nones here’s how they breakdown by type:

Type	Percent
Atheist	14
Agnostic	17
Religion not important	39
Religion important	30

Less than a third don’t believe in God or aren’t sure. The rest do believe in God or at least in a higher power but just don’t care.

## 2 Statistics

What is the fastest growing religious affiliation in America today? Religious Nones. Where does this term “None” come from? The US census. In the religious section there is a choice called “None.” They are also called the “Religious Unaffiliated,” “unattached,” “unbranded,” “Unbelievers,” “unchurched,” “unsaved,” “churchless,” “free-thinkers,” “heathens,” “pagans,” “metaphysicals,” “nothingarians,” “secular,” “humanist,” and “spiritual but not religious.”

Let’s look at some statistics.

From 2007 to 2014

Group	2007	2014	Percent Change
Mainline Protestant	18.1%	14.7%	-3.4%
Catholic	23.9%	20.8%	-3.1%
Evangelical Protestant	26.3%	25.4%	-0.9%
Non-Christian faiths	4.7%	5.9%	+1.2%
Unaffiliated	16.1%	22.8%	+6.7%

That makes the unaffiliated the second biggest religious affiliation behind only evangelical protestants. 56 million Americans fall into this group.

Each year of the 1990s, 1.3 million more American adults joined the ranks of the Nones.

What is the definition of a religious none?

These are atheists, agnostics, and people who don’t subscribe to any religion at all.

In his book *The Rise of the Nones* author James Emery White states, "The real mark of a *none* is not the rejection of God but the rejection of any specific religion." Most Nones, as we shall see in a bit, would consider themselves "spiritual but not religious." They are not all anti-God. They do generally have a basic belief system. It just does not include a church, synagogue, mosque, or temple.

## Breakdown by age

Group	Born	Percent Unaffiliated
Silent Generation	1928-1945	11%
Baby Boomers	1946-1964	17%
Gen. X	1965-1980	23%
Old Millennials	1981-1989	34%
Young Millennials	1990-1996	36%

This one is particularly disturbing. What it shows is that the younger generation is becoming more unaffiliated and by a big margin. Over three times as many young people are Nones versus the oldest generation.

## By Gender

Gender	Percent of Unaffiliated
Men	57%
Women	43%

These next two are interesting.

## By Income Distribution

Income	Percent Unaffiliated
Less than \$30,000	33%
\$30,000-\$49,999	20%
\$50,000-\$99,999	26%
\$100,000 or more	21%

You would expect those who are wealthier to depend less on God yet the opposite is true. The poorest are the ones who have rejected God. However, that could be tied to age since most Nones are younger and the younger tend to have lower salaries.

## By Education Distribution

Education	Percent Unaffiliated
High school or less	38%
Some college	32%
College	18%
Post-graduate degree	11%

You'd think that the more educated a person is the more they'd think that they are too smart for God. But the opposite is true. Those with less education are more likely to be unaffiliated. This would not be age affected.

Now we are going to look at the spiritual beliefs of the Nones. This will reinforce the idea that Nones are spiritual but not religious.

## Belief in God among the Unaffiliated

Belief	
Believe in God; absolutely certain	27%
Believe in God; fairly certain	22%
Believe in God; not too/not at all certain	11%
Believe in God; don't know	1%
Do not believe in God	33%
Other/don't know if they believe in God	6%

60% of the unaffiliated do believe in God to some degree. So we are not talking about all atheists and agnostics.

Sources of guidance on right and wrong among the unaffiliated\*\*

Source	Percent
Religion	7%
Philosophy/reason	18%
Common sense	57%
Science	17%
Don't know	2%

If you combine Philosophy/reason and Common sense you get 75%. That means that  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the Nones rely on themselves to determine right and wrong. They have no external standard and certainly no proven eternal standard. It's based on what they think is best. Isn't that rather scary? What happens when two Nones disagree on some important ethical issue? Who's right? The one who shouts the loudest?

When two Christians disagree what can they reference to solve the conflict? Usually the Bible, the eternal word of God. Now there may be a difference of interpretation but then they can go to a pastor to help mediate.

Here's an interesting one.

How many believe in Heaven:

Believe	37%
Don't Believe	53%
Other/Don't know	9%

How many believe in Hell:

Believe	27%
Don't Believe	65%
Other/Don't know	8%

It's rather convenient that more don't believe in Hell than in Heaven.

Reality and truth does not cease to exist because someone doesn't believe in it.

Where does New Jersey fit in all of this?

The average percent of Nones across the country is 22.8%.

New Jersey is at 18%, which is below average.

The lowest is Alabama at 12%. Vermont is the highest at 37%.

Here is New Jersey's breakdown.

Buddhist	Catholic	Evangelical Protestant	Hindu	Historically Black Protestant	Jehovah's Witness	Jewish	Mainline Protestant	Mormon	Muslim
< 1%	34%	13%	3%	6%	1%	6%	12%	1%	3%
Orthodox Christian	Other Christian	Other Faiths	Other World Religions	Unaffiliated (religious "nones")	Don't know				
1%	< 1%	1%	1%	18%	1%				

Is America becoming less religious? That could be the case. But some claim that it may be just that the unaffiliated are simply more willing to identify as such. Years ago it wasn't as socially acceptable to be an atheist or non-religious person. So if you were and someone asked you what religion you were you would more likely answer with what you grew up with. But now being a "none" is less likely to raise an eyebrow.

### 3 Becoming more secular

These statistics are for the Nones.

How important is religion in your life? Not too/not at all

2007	2014
57%	65%

The flip side is that 1/3 do consider religion to be important in their lives.

How often do you pray? Seldom/never

2007	2014
56%	62%

So 38% do pray.

How often do you attend religious services? A few times a year or less

2007	2014
89%	91%

Do you believe in God or universal spirit? Yes

2007	2014
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70%	61%
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Most, by far, do believe in a higher power.

34 percent of Americans never attend a worship service other than the usual weddings and other ceremonies. This is an all-time high.

Over fifty years ago Time magazine asked "Is God Dead?" Has science made God unnecessary?

There have always been religious charlatans. But with the TV and internet these purveyors of a religion of self are able to reach more people and quicker. Think about Norman Vincent Peale, Dale Carnegie, Deepak Chopra, Oprah Winfrey, Andrew Weil, and many others. Why get up early on Sundays to go to church when you can feel good about yourself from your couch? You can get whatever you want in whatever flavor you believe just from the internet.

Plus there are the New Atheists or Evangelical Atheism. These are people who are not content to keep their disbelief in God to themselves; they want to recruit others to their side. The so-called four horseman of atheism are:

- Richard Dawkins
- Sam Harris
- Christopher Hitchens
- Daniel Dennett

Here are some of the books that they wrote:

- *The End of Faith*
- *The God Delusion*
- *God is Not Great*
- *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*

They are also more organized.

- Sam Harris started the Reason Project.
- Richard Dawkins is the founder of the Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science.
- Christopher Hitchens served on the advisory board of the Secular Coalition for America.
- Daniel Dennett has also been a vocal supporter of The Clergy Project, which is an organization that provides support for clergy in the US who no longer believe in God and cannot fully participate in their communities any longer.

There are many, perhaps over 100 websites for atheists. Here are some of the top ones.

- Reddit Atheism
- Richard Dawkins
- Friendly Atheist
- The Skeptic's Dictionary
- Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster
- Common Sense Atheism
- Unreasonable Faith
- Skeptic's Annotated Bible

This is in addition to the older established atheist organizations such as:

- American Atheists
- American Humanist Association
- Freedom from Religion Foundation

The New Atheists have gained a large following by writing many books, staging and recording their debates and even putting on conventions.

They are a force to be reckoned with and they are easily accessible.

## **4 What are some reasons for being a None?**

### **4.1 Age at leaving**

For those who were raised in a religious home what age range were they in when they left their faith?

- 62% were younger than 18.
- 28% were between 18 and 29.
- 5% were between the ages of 30 and 49
- 2% were 50 or older

So we see that most people raised in a religious home leave their faith before they turn 18. This indicates that this happens while they are still living at home. This has huge implications one of which is that the religious atmosphere at home is not solid enough, foundational enough, or attractive enough to keep the child in the faith.

### **4.2 Reasons by percent for those who grew up with a childhood religion**

When asked why they abandoned their childhood religion Americans gave these reasons.

- 60% stopped believing in the religion's teachings
- 32% was that their family was never that religious when they were growing up
- 29% was their experience of negative religious teachings about or treatment of gay and lesbian people
- 19% point to the clergy sexual-abuse scandal
- 18% was a traumatic event in their life
- 16% was that their congregation became too focused on politics



## Half of 'nones' left childhood faith over lack of belief, one-in-five cite dislike of organized religion

*Reasons for disaffiliating among those who were raised in a religion and are currently ...*

	<b>NET Unaffiliated</b>	<b>Atheist</b>	<b>Agnostic</b>	<b>Nothing in particular</b>
	%	%	%	%
<b>NET Don't believe</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>37</b>
Disenchanted/don't believe	36	71	46	25
Not interested in/don't need religion	7	3	8	7
Views evolved	7	7	12	5
Went through a crisis of faith	1	2	1	1
<b>NET Dislike organized religion</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>22</b>
Anti-institutional religion	15	2	17	16
Religion focuses on power/politics	4	5	1	6
Religion causes conflict	1	3	2	1
<b>NET Religiously unsure/undecided</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>22</b>
Unaffiliated but religious	7	1	1	10
Seeking/open-minded	6	3	5	7
Spiritual but not religious	3	2	4	3
Uncertain about beliefs	2	0	4	2
<b>NET Inactive believer</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>14</b>
Non-practicing	8	0	2	11
Too busy	2	0	1	3
<b>Other</b>	<b>&lt;1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>&lt;1</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Unclear/no answer</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>

Note: Excludes those who said they had been misclassified and were still affiliated with a religion. Figures do not sum to 100% or to subtotals indicated because multiple responses were permitted.

Source: 2014 U.S. Religious Landscape Study recontact survey conducted March 17-May 6, 2015. QC13.

"Choosing a New Church or House of Worship"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Here are some suggested reasons for this phenomenon.

### 4.3 Sexual Revolution

The sexual revolution in America was from the 1960's to the mid 1980's. This revolution led to the normalization of public nudity, pornography, marital infidelity, premarital sex, and homosexuality and ultimately to the legalization of abortion. What was one of the results of this revolution? Higher divorce rates. The 70's and 80's had the highest divorce rates post-WWII. Many of the children who grew up in those broken homes had an absent or rarely involved father. So without this father example and authority how can you care about a Heavenly Father?

Research has shown that family stability—or instability—can impact the transmission of religious identity. 32% of Americans who were raised by divorced parents will become Nones. Whereas only 23% of those whose parents were married during most of their formative years will become Nones.

Dr. Anthony Horvath who wrote the book "Faith and Family Under Fire: Why Apologetics is Failing in the 21st Century" said, "Studies show that the biggest factor in successfully transmitting the faith to the next generation is strong families

that are grounded in the faith. The influence of the father, in particular, is profound. There is a statistical link between fractured families and low church attendance.”

#### 4.4 More Financial Security

The more financially secure you are the more the tendency to deny God.

Proverbs 30:8-9 states this.

Keep falsehood and lies far from me;  
give me neither poverty nor riches,  
but give me only my daily bread.

<sup>9</sup>Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you  
and say, ‘Who is the LORD?’

Or I may become poor and steal,  
and so dishonor the name of my God.

America has gotten more prosperous as a whole and when that happens more people will feel more secure in their wealth than they will in God. Their safety net is not the everlasting hands of God but their savings account.

#### 4.5 The Internet

Not long ago if someone had doubts about God they probably had no one to talk to except for a priest or pastor and they would try to appease those doubts. Now if you have doubts you can go on the internet and find all kinds of sources that will confirm your doubts and pile new doubts on top.

It has been said that the internet is the destroyer of religion.

#### 4.6 Less Religious Households

A study done by Pew Research Center in 2009 found that those who left the faith often came from homes that did not regularly attend church when they were children or teenagers. They were more likely to not “having had a very strong religious faith as a child or teenager.” Only 11% of those who left said that they had a very strong faith during childhood.

This is one reason why Hebrews 10:25 is so important, “not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.”

#### 4.7 Perceptions

Religion is increasingly viewed by Nones as:

- Judgmental
- Homophobic
- Hypocritical
- too political
- causing more problems in society than it solves

Contributing factors to these perceptions are:

- Church scandals
- Sexual abuse cases
- Extremism
- Leadership greed and materialism among mega-pastors

## 4.8 Individualism and Social Isolation

With computers, tablets, and smart phones the younger generation has become individualistic and socially isolated. Face-to-face has been replaced by “likes” and texts.

An article in the NY Times said, “Social isolation is a growing epidemic — one that’s increasingly recognized as having dire physical, mental and emotional consequences. Since the 1980s, the percentage of American adults who say they’re lonely has doubled from 20 percent to 40 percent.”

And this generation increasingly does not even see the need for social engagement. Only 28% of the 46 million Nones agree that it's important to belong to “a community of people who share your values and beliefs.” Of course, church is the primary institution for community and yet most Nones do not see the need for that.

## 4.9 Science, Logic, and Lack of Evidence

Forty-nine percent of those who were raised in a religious family said that they left their religion because of a lack of evidence and belief. Science, logic, and common sense were major contributors to this.

The visible world is the greater reality and the supernatural becomes a fantasy. This is the opposite of what C.S. Lewis said when he called this world the shadowlands.

## 4.10 Pluralization

Pluralization can be defined as the following:

- The idea that any one religion is not the sole and exclusive source of truth, and thus the acknowledgement that at least some truths and true values exist in other religions.
- As acceptance of the concept that two or more religions with mutually exclusive truth claims are equally valid.
- The understanding that the exclusive claims of different religions turn out, upon closer examination, to be variations of universal truths that have been taught since time immemorial.

In pluralization all religions are basically equal. So how does someone know what is true? That is determined by what one thinks and experiences. Therefore there is no need to search for truth. So why go to church?

## 4.11 Religiously Mixed Households

Americans raised in households where the parents identified with different religious traditions are more likely to identify as a None (31%) than those raised in households where parents shared the same faith (22%).

Hence the warning in 2 Corinthians 6:14, “Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?”

## 4.12 Morality

Nones are less likely than religious Americans to link belief in God to moral behavior. If God is not a person’s standard for moral, righteous behavior then a large argument and reason for God is lost for many people.

- 21% say it is necessary to believe in God to be moral and have good values
- 77% reject this idea with 61% who strongly reject it

In contrast religious people who link morality to God:

- 78% of black Protestants
- 59% of white evangelical Protestants

- 59% of Catholics
- 43% of white mainline Protestants
- 43% of those who identify with non-Christian religions

What is disturbing here? Less than half of mainline Protestants do not teach that moral values must come from God? So then why would their children?

### 4.13 Perceived Uselessness of Religion

You can perhaps identify three distinct groups among the Nones: Rejectionists, Apatheists, and Unattached Believers.

58% are Rejectionists who say religion is not personally important in their lives and believe religion as a whole does more harm than good in society. These are the ones who see no need for religion and would rather that it go away completely. Notice that this is the majority of Nones.

22% are Apatheists who say religion is not personally important to them, but believe it generally is more socially helpful than harmful.

The final and smallest group is Unattached believers, who make up only 18% of the Nones. They say religion is important to them personally. This, the most positive group about religion is also the smallest.

### 4.14 Religious Switching

19% of Americans switched from their childhood religious identity to become unaffiliated as adults. But only 3% of Americans who were raised unaffiliated became religious as adults. This difference of 16 percentage points only adds to the numbers of the religiously unaffiliated.

The observation here: Religion is just not attractive.

## 5 Reaching Nones

First realize that there is not a one-stop-for-all message when it comes to reaching people. Because people are different, though the core of our message is always the Gospel, the method and approach may be different.

We can see this in Acts 17.

In verses 1 and 2 Paul was in Thessalonica at a Jewish synagogue. It says, “he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead.”

Because these people were from a religion background, Paul went right to the Scriptures.

Then starting in verse 16 Paul was in Athens with a group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers. In this message he focused on God as creator of the world and of history.

These, in contrast, were not religious people and so Paul used creation and reason.

In both messages he preaches Christ but from different angles.

We need to adjust our approach when reaching out to Nones.

Here’s another way of looking at it.

Fifty years ago, nearly everyone had at least a basic knowledge of Christianity. The challenge was to build upon that foundation and present the Gospel. They may have known that Jesus died for their sins, but they didn't know what to do with that information. The problem was not an intellectual debate but to bring them to a humble acceptance of God's free gift of salvation. People mostly believed in Heaven; they wanted to know how to get there. Handing out tracts, stadium revivals by Billy Graham, going door-to-door, and radio broadcasts like the "Hour of Power" did the job.

Today confronting the Nones is much different. Many of them do not have foundation. They don't believe that the Bible is any more truthful than other religious books. Truth is relative. Heaven may not even exist and Hell probably doesn't. If you pull out a Bible and read from John 3 about being born-again the only response you'll probably get is a smirk. The challenge is greater. The Gospel is at the end of a very long road. We have to get them to first care enough to listen.

Here are some ways to reach Nones and to prevent them from becoming Nones.

## 5.1 Start with our own children and family

The competition is rough. By the time a teen graduates from high school, he has been exposed to 40,000 hours of television and movies and 11,000 hours in the classroom, while getting only 800 hours in church.

## 5.2 Develop an intellectual foundation with our children

Parents must take the initiative and primary role in developing the spiritual formation of their children and adolescents. This means not just affecting a heart response but solidifying a head understanding also. We must lay such a foundation for our children that they can defend spiritual truths not just with Scripture but also with well thought out intellectual answers. They may have been involved in youth group, summer camp, and a short-term missionary trip and they may have had an experience that truly moved them. But they are not taught how to think deeply about their faith. They are "low information believers."

1 Peter 3:15 is a good verse for us and for our children, "but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always *being* ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence."

Are we teaching our children how to "make a defense"?

Teach them how to defend against for example:

- We have all sinned
- The exclusivity of Christianity
- The historical accuracy and reasonableness of the Bible
- Why there aren't many paths to God

## 5.3 Live what we say

We must also be able to stand the examination by our children between what we say and what we live. Otherwise we leave the door open for our children to think that it is a sham, all words and no action. Why should they expect to finish the course when it appears that we aren't even trying ourselves?

Matthew 5:16, "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."

## 5.4 Love the church and the people of the church

Do we rejoice in our spiritual lives or do our children hear us complaining about the music, complaining about the sermon, and complaining about everything else that they know about? If our children do not see us loving the church and loving our brothers and sisters in Christ then why should they?

Hebrews 10:24-25, "and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more as you see the day drawing near."

## 5.5 Give our children a reason to follow Christ

If our children do not see any value in Christianity then they will choose their own role models outside of Christianity when they are older. If Christianity is nothing more than one hour on Sundays then it will appear as just a club to our children. They need to see the value of Jesus in our lives. They need to see how the church positively affects us. They need to see good relationships between us and the other people in the church.

## 5.6 Change our process in order to draw Nones

James Emery White wrote the book, *In The Rise of the Nones*.

White writes that most church strategies "rest on a single, deeply flawed premise that *people want what you have to offer*." Then he says, "More often than not, they don't." Many, if not most, of the Nones are not interested in religion nor church at all. He says, "The real mark of a *none* is not the rejection of God but the rejection of any specific religion" They are not seekers. They do not care about their own religion and they certainly do not care about other people's religion.

White says that our first step in reaching the Nones is not to immediately give them the Gospel. He says that it is bringing that person to a point "where he or she is able to even *consider* accepting Christ."

He discusses how evangelism has changed over the years in America by presenting three models. Each model has the same key events but in different order.

The four key events in evangelism are:

- 1) Addressing the person either unchurched or Nones: These are the unbelievers/unsaved that we are trying to reach.
  - 2) Christ: Salvation in Christ is the ultimate goal.
  - 3) Community: Bringing them into the community of the church
  - 4) Cause: A mission, outreach, or event initiated by and associated with the church.
- 
- 1) Up until about the 1980's most people had a basic understanding of the main tenets of Christianity and so the model looked like this.

**Unchurched → Christ → Community → Cause**

First, unchurched people accepted the gospel, then they joined the church, and then they started supporting the church's cause. Cause is defined as any service both within the church such as ushering or outside the church such as evangelism.

- 2) Then came the Baby Boomers in the 1990's through 2000's who had been raised in a church but left for whatever reason. This required the second model.

### **Unchurched → Community → Christ → Cause**

Here, first the unchurched needed to once again trust the church, then they could make a commitment to Christ, and then support the church's cause. They needed to first experience the fellowship of the church.

- 3) Now reaching the Nones requires a third model.

### **Nones → Cause → Community → Christ**

Nones are more interested in the common good and not in personal conversion. White writes, "it is *cause* that arrests the attention of the world." First show the Nones why church is relevant, then bring them into the church community, and finally they will receive Christ as Savior.

Surveys indicate that 82 percent of unchurched people would come to church this weekend if they were invited by a friend.

We are a consumer culture. People want to know what is in it for them. Try to get them to ask themselves, "What can I do for others?" Then offer the church as a launching point for this. Tell them about church ministries that they can be involved in. Or if your church does not have many community ministries then get them into something more national or international such as sponsoring a child through Compassion International.

## **5.7 Change our apologetics**

Forgiveness and grace are powerful themes in Christianity. However, they are not without a cost and that cost is the death of Jesus on a cross. We must always present the Jesus and the full Gospel. But how we introduce the Gospel can vary greatly. We already saw how Paul used two different messages in Acts 17.

Look at 1 Corinthians 9:19-22

<sup>19</sup> For though I am free from all *men*, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more. <sup>20</sup> To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under <sup>u</sup>the Law though not being myself under <sup>u</sup>the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law; <sup>21</sup> to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law. <sup>22</sup> To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some.

When you give an adult medicine it usually just comes as is and the person takes it because they know that they have to whether they like it or not. But children are not so understanding and so if the medicine does not taste good then they spit it out. So they make children's medicine in flavors: grape, orange, cherry.

We have to be like that with the Gospel. Same core message but packaged differently and in a way to make it appealing.

Nones do not ask the questions that classical apologetics is familiar with such as "Why should I believe that Jesus is the only way?" or "Why won't my good deeds get me to Heaven?" Rather what the Nones ask are "So what?" or "I'm fine."

What does your church offer to me that I don't already have?" or even "All religions are toxic. Wouldn't the world be better off without any religion?"

With them, we can no longer rely on "This is what the Bible says..." because they either do not believe that the Bible is God's word or they do not care what the Bible says. To them, it is just a book written by men. Therefore, we lose that authority. Showing them that Jesus fulfilled 315 Old Testament Messianic prophecies will probably not impress them as much as it does us.

Now you may want to counteract that by quoting Isaiah 55:11, "So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It will not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing what I desire, And without succeeding *in the matter* for which I sent it." You would argue that anytime that someone quotes God's word it will have an effect and so even if the None does not believe the Bible we should still quote it at them and let the Holy Spirit do His job. The problem with that thinking is that this is not what that verse says. This is one of those misused verses. The misuse is saying that every time that we quote Scripture God will use it in that person's life. No, that's not what it says. It says that every word that comes out of God's mouth will accomplish what He set it out to do. It is God's mouth, not our mouths. That is the key. Every word in the Bible has the effect and power that God intended. Our words, on the other hand, can be unfruitful. The parable of the sower demonstrates this. Some seed—which is God's word—were eaten by birds, some withered, and some were choked. Only the fourth situation produced growth. Only one produced fruit.

We shouldn't be lazy and think that if we throw a few verses at them then our work is done.

They want to hear reasons for why we believe.

1 Peter 3:15, "but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always *being* ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence;..."

You notice in the Gospel presentations in Acts that they use history, reason, nature, philosophy, and anything else to persuade the listener to come to Christ.

We must also realize that the Christian words that we use may not mean the same thing to us and to the person that we are speaking to.

We say "God" and think holy and almighty sovereign King of all. They may think impersonal force or maybe at best a disinterested being who could not care less about what is happening here.

We say "salvation" and think from Hell. They hear "salvation" and think from unhappiness.

We say "Jesus" and think God incarnate, Savior of the world. They hear "Jesus" and think a good teacher.

We say "sin" and think universal offenses against a holy God. They think an old-fashioned word that doesn't even apply anymore.

We say, "You are a sinner and must come to Jesus for salvation in order to go to Heaven" and know exactly what that means. They hear "blah, blah, blah." It doesn't register in the least bit.

We may have to start at the basics and define terms. They don't have to agree at the moment with our definitions, but they should at least understand them so that we are on the same page. Now that doesn't mean that we start off reading them a glossary of Christianity but that we need to perhaps avoid Christian terms and speak in more general concepts.



Instead of using the word “sin” perhaps try this. “Would you agree that everyone has done something wrong no matter how small? Maybe a lie, or jealousy, or a bad thought towards someone. Or let’s say that someone has never done anything wrong like this. Wrong doing can also be not doing something that you should have. Now I’m not going to believe that there is someone out there who has always done the exact right thing at every moment of their life. They always gave the right amount of money to the poor. They always spent their free time helping others. They always said the right thing at the right time.” If they agree with you on this then you’ve got them to agree that they are sinners but without using that term.

We also need to challenge their conclusions and make them think.

For example, they may say that religion is toxic, that it does more harm than good. We could respond, “Can you tell me several things that religion has done that is good?” If they respond with “nothing.” We can say, “What about these organizations that were formed to honor God and to help people: St. Jude Hospital and many other hospitals that start with “St.,” Compassion International, YMCA, Salvation Army, Christian Children’s Fund, Habitat For Humanity International, and many, many more? What about the work of Mother Theresa? What about the Christians who started leper colonies to comfort the outcasts of society? The Lutheran Malaria Initiative has provided bed nets to protect over 2.4 million people so far against malaria in Africa. There are soup kitchens, prison ministries, hospital ministries, and so on. Would you say that these are good things that were created by religion?” They may respond with “But they still do more harm than good.” “But at least you can admit that they also do a lot of good? Maybe you can be a part of those good things. Would you be willing to join with others and help the impoverished in your own community?”

Here you are trying to give them questions to think about. They may seem smug and unyielding at the moment, but they may go home and consider what you had to say.

Try to work with their heart and not just their mind.

Instead of arguing Jesus’ deity, maybe start with His compassion, then His forgiveness. Ask “Why do you think that Jesus died on a cross?” “Do you think that His sacrifice applies to everyone across time and so is applied to you personally?” “Do you think that Jesus knew about you personally when He died on the cross?”

Some other questions that you can ask them.

- Tell me something that I can pray for you. Can I pray for that now?
- What do you think is the best way to know about God?
- What is your purpose in life? What about people in general?
- If you are a spiritual person then what do you think prompts you to that?
- Do you ever think about what will happen when you die?

Many of the Nones have never heard the real Gospel message. Ask them what makes someone a born-again Christian or how does the Bible say that a person can guarantee going to Heaven and their guess might be way off. They may be interested in a non-preachy presentation of the Gospel and they may find themselves surprised by it.

Notice in John 4 Jesus’ conversation with the woman at the well. He didn’t just walk up to her and present to her the Four Spiritual Laws. He started the conversation talking about water. Then by playing off of her interest and knowledge He eventually lead her to the conclusion that He was the Messiah.

That’s what we want to do. We don’t want to force the conversation but we do want to guide it. However, instead of taking minutes to do this as Jesus did in this story we may take weeks or months. But realize that this woman had some religious understanding that Jesus could play off of. Your unaffiliated friend may not have any foundation.

It is certainly easier to share the Gospel with people who already have a base of Christian truth, people who may share our same values and morality. This is the low hanging fruit. But the number of these types of people are becoming less and less and they are being replaced by people who do not care about religion or God and who have no real knowledge of basic truth. This is fruit that is higher up and requires more work. We need to learn how to build a ladder that will get us that high up.

## 5.8 Make the church welcoming to Nones

This does not imply that when a None comes into a church service that we shun them. Of course we welcome them. The problem is that the majority of Nones will not go to a church service on their own.

The deep connection that a church can provide is key because research shows that people long for community and a deeper purpose than themselves. There's no easy fix or formula for reaching the "Nones" but a church that loves its members and community well is off to a great start.

The church needs to open its doors to the community and not just Sunday morning service or home Bible studies. Have picnics, neighborhood clean-up events, and other community focused events. Show the Nones that the church does care about people and is not just a cloistered group of strange people.

Jon Tyson, a pastor in NYC, said, "The early church leaders didn't have the things we now consider essential for our faith. They didn't have official church buildings, vision statements or core values. They had no social media, radio broadcasts or celebrity pastors. They didn't even have the completed New Testament. Christ-followers were often deeply misunderstood, persecuted and some gave their lives for their faith. Yet they loved and they served and they prayed and they blessed—and slowly, over hundreds of years, they brought the empire to its knees. They did it through love."

Don't just be a church in the town, be a church that makes a difference for the town.

## 5.9 Religion and Science are not enemies

One third of 18- to 29-year olds who leave the church say that the church is out of step on scientific developments and debate.

Creationism versus Evolution can be a legitimate sticking point for some Nones. Don't make this an issue unless they do. You don't need to be a Creationist to go to Heaven.

You can always say, "I believe that God is the creator of everything and so no factual science will ever contradict the Bible because God will never contradict Himself. We may not, at the moment, understand how they fit together for every issue but that doesn't mean that they can't. Besides, there are a great many scientific mysteries that we can't figure out right now, but that doesn't mean that science contradicts itself." And then move on.

## 5.10 Introduce their children to the church

Just like Christians, Nones want the best for their children. Invite their children to something causal like a soccer camp, an all-day trip like skiing, or to Vacation Bible School. Many atheists will be OK with sending their children to religious events or schools if they think that it is the best for their children. If their children make friends or really love the event then they will beg to come back. Generally then the parents will follow. Children's ministries are also outreach opportunities.

## 5.11 Be their friend

Listen to that person. Care about that person. Pray for that person while with them. Most people have never had someone pray for them while right in front of them.

Why did they turn away from God? Was there a severe trauma that they blamed God for? Were they insulted by a church member? Do they feel isolated, alone?

Usually a person does not turn away from God for an intellectual reason, usually it is for an emotional reason. For example, their child declared that they are a homosexual and since they know that the church would condemn that they choose their child over God not realizing that they can embrace both. Or they suffer a great loss (death, disease, financial, relationship) and blame God. Let them talk about that. Listen. Don't take everything that they say and bring it to the Gospel because then they'll feel like they are being manipulated.

Be a good listener. Talk about them and not just about your church.

Bring these people into the church community. Let them know that you care about them and that Jesus cares about them.

Don't try to answer all of their questions especially if you are just guessing at the answers. Tell them that you'll look into their question and then, of course, make that effort. If you still can't answer their question and others can't help then tell them that you tried. Challenge them to seek out the answer themselves. The fact that you made an effort might be enough.

Don't wait for them to come to you. Reach out to the Nones as individuals and as a community.

Don't make them your project. People can figure that out and if they don't respond in the time that you want then just don't dump them so that you can move on to the next person.

We must live authentic lives. Don't try to put on an act. Don't try to appear super spiritual. They will see through that and think you're a phony. Then they won't believe anything that you say. Be willing to share some of your own struggles and tell them how you are working with Jesus to overcome them. If they believe in prayer ask them to pray for you. In fact, possibly ask them to pray for you right at that moment. That might be the first time that they've focused on God in years. If they see you as genuine then they might be more open to hear what we have to say about Jesus.

## 5.12 Meet their needs

Barna Research did a portrait of the American life comparing 2000 to today.

Topic	2000	Today
Concerned about the future	64%	77%
Lonely	12%	20%
Happy	92%	82%
Trying to find new friends	31%	37%
Stressed out	29%	35%

David Kinnaman who led this research said, "As a nation, we are embracing the digital revolution and, ironically, we are becoming a lonelier population. While there are many benefits of being participants in possibly the most relationally connected age in human history, the social media revolution has not made us feel more connected, less lonely, or replete with friends."

Over a third of people are stressed out. Jesus said in John 14:27, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”

People don’t want to come to a church and hear about politics or how we’re better than the other church or that we need to give more money. They want the peace that Jesus has to offer.

Kinnaman concludes. “The Church, when functioning properly, can address the rising epidemic of loneliness, financial strain and indebtedness, increasing concerns about morality, among many other things. Faith communities must respond to the “fearful” realities of the future with wisdom and love. After all, Jesus teaches that we should not be anxious about tomorrow, not even the changing psychographics of Americans.”

## 5.13 The “Dones”

In the book “Church Refugees” by Josh Packard, he found that 10 percent of current churchgoers say they are “almost done,” i.e., on the verge of walking out.

He said this:

A few years ago, in the course of collecting data for a different project, I (Josh) had the occasion to talk with some church planters and ministry resource leaders over lunch. In some way or another, they all wanted to know why so many people were leaving the church. Finally, one relatively new pastor asked the group, “So what’s different about this era that so many people are leaving the church? What happened?”

As I began to formulate some kind of answer based on all of my recently completed graduate schooling in sociology, Jessica, a woman who had been working in ministry-resource publication for over two decades, spoke up: “Nothing. People have always been leaving the church. It’s just that now they’re not coming back. That’s the real issue. We’re doing things that drive people away from the church. We’re the problem. We’ve dechurched them. They’re done with us.”

Jessica’s words hung over the table for a few seconds that felt like hours before I broke the uneasy silence by asking, “So, what do you all think? Is Jessica right? Of the people you know who’ve left, do you think they’re coming back? Do you know why they left?”

One by one, they all revealed that, indeed, they didn’t think any of the people who had left their congregations would be coming back with the exception of a general and vague hope that young people going off to college could eventually return. Instead, they related story after story of people who had left their congregations after prolonged struggle, searching, and sometimes incredibly harmful and divisive experiences.

As they recounted the reasons people had given them for leaving their churches, I heard about pastors behaving poorly; churches focused so much on buildings and infrastructure that they neglected the outside world; unwanted and distracting political stances; perceived persecution over issues of gender and sexuality; hypocrisy; and many, many stories about judgment.

Thomas E. Bergler wrote a book “The Juvenilization of American Christianity.” He describes juvenilization as “the process by which the religious beliefs, practices, and developmental characteristics of adolescents become accepted as appropriate for Christians of all ages.” He further says, “By personalizing Christianity and creatively blending it with elements of popular culture ranging from rock music to political protests, youth ministers helped ensure the ongoing

vitality of Christianity in America. But these same ministries also sometimes pandered to the consumerism, self-centeredness, and even outright immaturity of American believers.”

He says that juvenilization started in the 1930s and 1940s with the rise of youth ministry to counter the problems in America. The idea was to work with the young to train them to make a positive impact on culture and also to encourage them to political action.

By the 1950s they discovered that they were competing with “high school and youth consumerism.” The response was to somewhat adapt youth ministry to American culture. This is discussed in a chapter called “How to Have Fun, Be Popular, and Save the World at the Same Time.” The result was a “version of Christianity that embraced fun and entertainment while maintaining strict rules about bodily purity.” They “wanted teenagers to make sacrifices for Jesus, not just have fun. But in the long run, the pleasurable side of this spirituality would prove overpoweringly enticing—and its rigors all too easy to avoid.”

By the 1960s “evangelical youth environments increasingly glorified entertainment and self-fulfillment and downplayed calls to spiritual maturity.”

This attitude filtered up through the age groups and resulted in churches where people believe “religion is to help people be good,” and to “help us feel better about ourselves.” God is in the background and shows up when we need help with problems.

The result is a feel-good faith but not an intellectual one. So is it any surprise that when someone continues to feel bad while attending church then their conclusion is that the church—and God—has failed? So pursue something else and if it makes you feel better than church then it is better. Holiness is not a goal. Becoming like Christ is not a goal. Feeling good is the goal. We can think of many current churches, leaders, and books that preach a feel-good Christianity.

What can we do to stop this exodus?

- We need to make sure that everyone is accounted for. That no one disappears and fades away. If you don’t see someone for a while then call them up or at least send them an email.



- As people and leaders we need to not try to act super-spiritual. Be vulnerable. Don’t make people feel that they can’t fit in. Years ago at my church I brought someone for the first time. Another church member talked to him for a few minutes and then asked, “Do you have a Biblical reason for leaving your church?” That was wrong for at least two reasons. 1) You don’t challenge a person who is visiting for the first time. You don’t put them on the spot and make them pass some test of yours. 2) I’m not aware of any verse in the Bible that gives a Biblical reason for leaving a church.

- Avoid politicizing the church. Jesus was not a Republican. All conservatives are not moral, good people. Your politics are YOUR politics and not the church's. Don't turn people off of the church because you want them to vote your way.
- Don't put on your sin sniffer and think that it is your calling to sniff out every sin in the church regardless of how small, but be on the alert for any sin that is obvious and perhaps spreading through the church. Watch even the leaders of the church. But when you confront this sin remember Galatians 6:1, "Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; *each one* looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted."
- Be a joyful people. "Joy," "Glad," "Rejoice," "Celebrate" and their variants are used over 600 times in the Bible. No one wants to come to a church where they feel like a microphone because people are constantly telling them their woes. Don't be a person to avoid; be a person that people want to be around because you encourage them.
- Get everyone involved. Have plenty of ministries. When people feel needed and productive they will stay and, even more so, be eager to come. Church isn't just for coming and listening to sermons. If that is all that church is then you might as well stay home and listen to sermons on the radio. Rather, church is a community where we grow close to each other; encourage, comfort, support, and motivate each other. It is where we unite to fight sin, oppression, and injustice. It is where we deliver food, hope, and the Gospel to those in the community.

One study gave the top six reasons why the formerly unchurched remain active in the church.

- 1) 62% – Ministry Involvement
- 2) 55% – Sunday School
- 3) 54% – Obedience to God
- 4) 49% – Fellowship of Members
- 5) 38% – Pastor/Preaching
- 6) 14% – Worship Services

## 5.14 Address exclusivity

Most Nones still believe in God or at least in a higher power. They have rejected is a belief system that makes dogmatic claims of exclusivity. The problem is not they care about whether the claims are true or not. The problem is that they reject out of hand any religious claims that are exclusive. What is an exclusive claim? "No one can go to Heaven unless you are born-again." "You must be a Catholic to go to Heaven."

They are not seekers. They think that they are comfortable with what they believe. 88% are not even looking for anything more regarding religion. A 2011 Baylor survey found that 44% of Americans said they spend no time seeking "eternal wisdom," and a Lifeway survey found that nearly half of Americans said they never wonder whether they will go to heaven.

So how do we counter Christian exclusivity when, in fact, it is exclusive as most religions are? I think that one way is by emphasizing that Jesus' FREE gift of salvation is for EVERYONE. You don't have to follow a prescribed set of rituals over your lifetime to go to Heaven. It is a one-time acceptance of God's free gift. Now, of course, you must believe that Jesus is God and that He died for your sins and rose alive from the dead. But is that actually unreasonable? If Haagen Dazs ice cream says that they are giving away a free ice cream to each person today at their store and you go to a Carvel ice cream store would you expect Carvel to give you free ice cream? No. You must go to a Haagen Dazs store to get it and that is reasonable. If Ford is giving you a free TV this weekend for every car that you buy then you wouldn't go to Toyota and demand the same gift. Everyone would find that to be arrogant and unreasonable.

So then why is it unreasonable to expect that if the one and only true God is offering you a free gift that it is acceptable to go to the imaginary God that you've dreamed up in your head and expect that non-existent God to give you the same gift. You have God standing in front of you holding out a free gift but you've turned your back on Him and are talking to the wall. The problem isn't that God withdrew the gift; the problem is that you are demanding it from the wrong thing.

Are there infinite Heavens with infinite gods offering you infinite gifts of eternal life and you can choose whichever one you feel like? Does that sound reasonable? Or does it sound more reasonable that there is one Heaven and one God offering freely one gift?

And of course that gift is offered to everyone. Not just Americans. Not just rich people. Not just people who grew up in Christian homes. Everyone.

Of course you can also present the old argument of "If you board a plane and want to go to California you would expect the pilot to follow the one pre-determined route to get there." "If there is only one way to do a particular brain surgery then you wouldn't want the doctor to do whatever he feels like." There are many, many instances in life where we understand and accept that there is only one proper way of doing something. So why do we not allow God, the creator of the universe, the same right?

### **5.15 Allow doubts to be expressed**

Don't shut down someone's legitimate doubts with a pat answer or give the impression that there is something wrong with them asking that kind of question. Then they'll only get frustrated and leave.

Let them express their concerns and doubts and then humbly work with them. Remember Jude 1:22, "And have mercy on some, who are doubting." Note the word "mercy," not criticism or condescension.

### **5.16 Fix "bad" religion**

What is the religion that usually makes the news? Islamist terrorists blowing up innocent women and children. Catholic priests molesting children and their bishops "hiding" them by moving them to other parishes where they do it again. TV evangelists racking in millions of dollars and spending it on expensive cars and houses.

But there are other ways that religion can appear bad. An over-emphasis on condemning homosexuality was one of the top reasons as to why people leave the church. The Bible does state that homosexuality is sin, but some Christians act as though it is the only sin and that homosexuals will be the ruin of the world. All and any sin will send someone to Hell. Cast all people as being under the judgment of God needing grace and forgiveness, not just homosexuals. Look at the Westboro Baptist Church in Topeka, Kansas. They hold up signs reading, "God hates fags." Is something like that going to entice Nones to come to church?

Many people see the answer to bad religion as being no religion. Since religion is intolerant and judgmental then we should get rid of religion completely.

The solution is to stop emphasizing the sins of other groups and instead present the good that religion really is. Get Nones to participate in the church's community works and in the church life. Talk up Jesus and the good.

## 6 Biography

My apologies for having such a sloppy biography. I should have specifically noted individual sentences and passages taken from articles and books, but when I copied them to a worksheet I lost track of what came from what. So here they all are.

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