



Growing Kentucky's Churches from the **Outside In**

*A Survey of Kentucky Residents
Who Are Unconnected To
Local Congregations*



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INTRODUCTION

In a time of drastic change, it is the learners who inherit the future.
The learned usually find themselves equipped to live in a world that no longer exists.

Eric Hoffer

A report about the unchurched appeals to people for different reasons. Perhaps you're a pastor and trying to equip your church to deal with the changing world around you. Or, maybe you are a layperson who wants to understand how the unchurched think. Or perhaps you are just curious about new research into the spiritual lives of more than 1 million Kentuckians.

If you've picked up this report, for one reason or another, you care about those individuals who are unconnected to a local church. In fact, chances are you have invested your time and energy to bring them into the life of a local church, to help influence their lives positively for Jesus Christ. Whatever your position, gifts or interests, I hope this report does nothing but fuel your engagement with unchurched people.

But I also hope this research helps to clarify your understanding of the views and experiences of unchurched adults currently residing in Kentucky. For whatever reason, many church leaders frequently make inaccurate assumptions about the people they are trying to reach.

This report is about putting aside those assumptions and trying to find effective, genuine ways of connecting with those people outside of Kentucky's churches. Think of this document, therefore, as a roadmap to the hearts and minds of unchurched Kentuckians.

A Statistical Snapshot

The roadmap is accurate because it is based upon a major new study conducted by the Barna Group (Ventura, California) on behalf of the Kentucky Baptist Convention (KBC). The research – consisting of 1204 telephone interviews among unchurched, nominally churched, and churched adults (included for comparison purposes) – provides a snapshot of how unchurched people think and feel. Bear in mind that unchurched people are individuals who have not attended a church service in the last six months (not including special events – such as weddings and funerals – or holidays)

The perspectives of churched and nominally churched adults help to show where there are gaps between churchgoers and non-churchgoers. Also, throughout this report, comparisons are made, when possible, to the U.S. average among all unchurched adults.

In statistical terms, this random sample provides data that are accurate to within +/- 3 percentage points. That means that even if we were to interview all unchurched adults in the state, the results would be within three percentage points in 95 out of 100 cases.

Hot off the presses, the research was completed in October 2004, providing readers an up-to-the-minute and comprehensive examination of the crucial issues facing ministry in Kentucky. The data emerging from this report are the property of KBC and may not be used without the written permission of KBC. The Barna Research Group, a division of The Barna Group, Ltd, conducted the study.

Report Overview

The “roadmap” is divided into seven chapters:

- Chapter 1 explores the spiritual journeys and commitments of the unchurched.
- Chapter 2 examines their demographics and psychographic profile.
- Chapter 3 looks at the perceptions and images the unchurched possess about Christianity, churches, and churchgoers.
- Chapter 4 delves into the types of churches they would prefer to attend.
- Chapter 5 assesses their religious beliefs and views of the Bible.
- Chapter 6 pinpoints differences between Kentucky’s four regions.
- And Chapter 7 looks at some recommendations for churches and individuals that emerge from the research.

Navigating the Future

Like any map, the research is just a representation of reality. We hope this research is truly helpful, but it is just a tool. The ultimate goal for any set of research is facilitating learning – for those of us at the Barna Group, we are devoted to helping church leaders make better decisions. In the final analysis, the success of this research will be measured years down the road if it enabled churches to be make favorable changes to the spiritual landscape, changes that will help Kentuckians experience a deeper, more vibrant faith in Christ.

As navigators, our task is daunting: at no time in history have fewer Americans started their religious exploration with Christianity. A majority of the people who are believers when they turn 18 will be long gone from Christian churches and Christian commitment by the time they are 30. As we shall see in this report, most of the unchurched are not opposed to faith or even to Christ. Most have even flirted with Christian commitment. But they have tried Christianity and found it wanting.

These realities – and many other significant challenges – underscore the danger that the Christian faith will continue to lose influence in Kentucky, just as it is nationwide. But these factors also portend an era of unprecedented opportunities. When tired traditions and meaningless allegiances fade away, real spiritual vitality can take its place.

The Role of Research

Even the best research cannot eliminate risk in decision-making, nor can research ascertain God's vision for your church or your ministry. Good decisions are based upon a combination of inputs such as prayer, Scripture knowledge, research, experience and instinct. Research is only one valuable ingredient in the process, but when used wisely and appropriately, research can bring about greater efficiency and efficacy in ministry endeavors.

As you review this report, you will undoubtedly find data that fit your experiences and some data that do not. Remember that your personal experiences with unchurched people do not – and cannot – tell you what is happening statewide with all unchurched people. This report provides the map to understanding the big picture. But your experiences provide you with the context for God's calling on your life and His purposes for your church. May God give you wisdom as you review this research.

David Kinnaman
The Barna Group, Ltd.
November 2004

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:
RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS**

- Overall, 32% of Kentucky’s adult population is unchurched – that is, has not been to a non-holiday worship service in a church for at least six months. This represents nearly 1 million Kentuckians.
- Most of Kentucky’s unchurched (81%) are *de*-churched. They used to regularly attend a church – many within the last five years – but no longer do so. More than two-fifths (42%) used to attend a Baptist church.
- The unchurched retain much of their spiritual commitment to Christ. Two-thirds of Kentucky’s unchurched adults (67%) say they have made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in their life. In all, 30% of the unchurched are born again Christians, having made a profession of faith in Christ and a confession of personal sins.
- Four types of challenges dominate the personal needs of the unchurched: health (19%), finances (14%), job-related (12%), and parenting (12%). Only 15% of the unchurched say they would consider seeking out a church for advice or help for a challenge they were facing.
- Nearly 9 in 10 unchurched adults (87%) say they are “moral.” However, most admit that they make moral choices based upon fulfilling others’ expectations, minimizing conflict, and maximizing personal comfort.
- Demographically, the unchurched in Kentucky tended to be younger, more educated, and politically moderate compared to churchgoers. Most are married (56%); one-third (35%) are parents of young kids. More than one in three (37%) have ever been divorced, which is higher than is true among Kentucky’s churching adults (27%).
- Most unchurched adult have either a favorable (56%) or indifferent (38%) opinion about the Christian faith. The unchurched have a slightly less favorable view of churches (42% and 51%, respectively). The youngest generations of Kentuckians expressed the least flattering perspectives about churches.
- While Christians are generally thought of as “nice people” (85%), the unchurched also say Christians are judgmental (61%), hypocritical (57%), and intolerant of other’s beliefs (52%).
- Southern Baptists are not widely or specifically spurned by the unchurched. “Only” one-quarter of the respondents said that the Southern Baptist phrase would raise specific concerns about a church for them (22%).

- In exploring church preferences, the unchurched displayed an incredibly wide variety of likes and dislikes. Generally, the unchurched gravitate to elements that they already know and that re-capture their memories of church. The preferred entry point among the unchurched is worship services (43%), followed by special events (20%).
- The unchurched reject being described as non-Christian (20%), lost (20%), prodigal (18%), and non-believer (11%), feeling that these terms are denigrating. Instead they say they would prefer if church referred to them as inquirers (56%), explorers (54%), or seekers (53%).
- The unchurched embrace an odd mixture of theological perspectives – including some that are biblical and many that are not. The most widely embraced belief (out of those that we assessed in this research) is that all people will be judged by God after they die, regardless of their religious beliefs (84%). But two-thirds do not believe there is such a thing as Satan (66%).
- Overall, 3 in every 5 unchurched believe they will personally go to Heaven when they die (59%).
- Most unchurched adults own at least one Bible (90%) and have a “high view” of Scripture (that it is inspired by God and has no errors). A plurality of unchurched adults (58%) said that the Bible is the inspired word of God (38% felt it should be taken literally while 20% said that some verses were meant to be symbolic rather than literal).

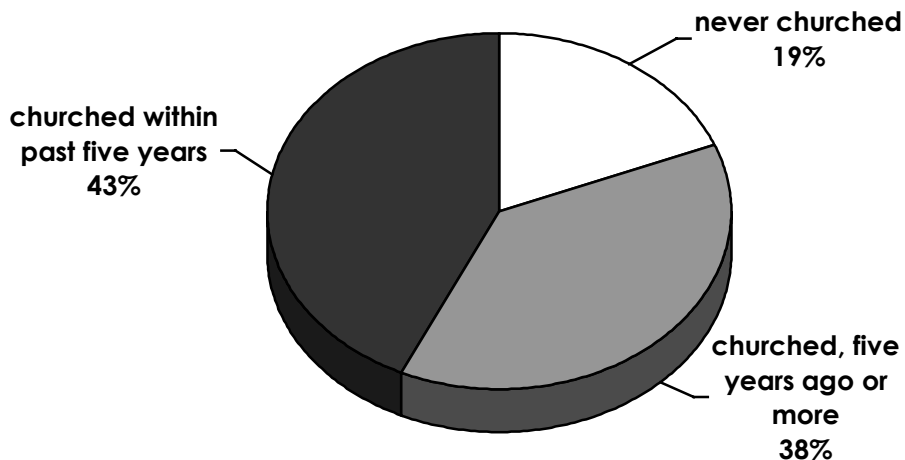
CHAPTER 1:
THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEYS OF KENTUCKY'S UNCHURCHED

Think for a moment about your impressions of unchurched people. What images come to mind? What do think about their church background and experiences? Now, here's an even more important question: do you think your assumptions are accurate?

One of the most commonly held myths about the unchurched is that most have never been to a church before, or that they have only attended for weddings, funerals, or holidays. As this assumption goes, the unchurched are believed to be essentially ignorant about what churches have to offer.

However, over the last decade, one of the most consistent patterns revealed by Barna's unchurched research is that very few of these people qualify as *never* churched. The same is true of Kentucky's unchurched residents: they could be more aptly described as *de-churched*. In all, we found that 4 in every 5 unchurched Kentucky residents (81%) had experienced "a period in their life when they regularly attended a church affiliated with the Christian faith." For nearly half of the unchurched, their interaction with a local church has been relatively recent – 43% say they have regularly attended a church within the past five years.

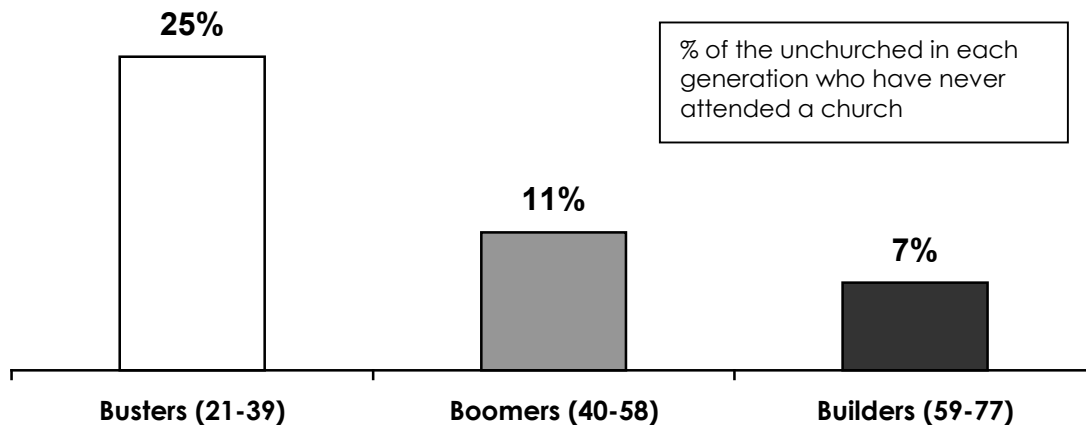
**Three Segments of Kentucky's Unchurched:
Most Are De-Churched**



Those who have never been an active church attender are a unique segment of the unchurched population (hereafter referred to as *never-churched* adults). In all, they represent about 1 in every 5 unchurched adults of Kentucky (19%). They also have a unique profile: they tend to be Busters – or those ages 21-39 – and singles.

This confirms one of the important realities of ministry in Kentucky: the younger the person, the less likely he or she is to have any previous experience in a church. Among Kentucky’s unchurched Busters, 25% have never attended a church, compared to just 11% of Boomers and 7% of Builders. This illustrates that there has been a slow, steady decline in church participation with each passing generation – although a majority of all three generations have had some previous experience in a church.

Among Kentucky's Unchurched, Young Adults Are Most Likely to be Never Churched



Previous Church Engagement

In a state where 1 in every 3 residents is affiliated with a Baptist church of some type, it is not surprising to find that nearly half of all unchurched Kentuckians (42%) used to attend a Baptist church. Nationwide, just 21% of the unchurched had attended a Baptist church in the past. This underscores another challenge that Baptist churches will face: these people are not “first-time visitors,” many of them have tried churches – Baptist churches in particular – and found them unfulfilling.

Besides “ex-Baptists,” 16% of the unchurched *used to* attend a Catholic church. However, this is slightly lower than the national average (28%).

When we asked about their reasons for avoiding churches, we found that the most common reason was because of a lack of time, schedule conflicts, or having to work. This reason was identified by one-quarter of the unchurched (26%). We typically find that, for most people, this is a cop out. What people are really saying is that the church has lost relevance.

In fact, other common responses included “not sure” (12%), “churches have nothing to offer” (8%), “just don’t go” (4%), and “too lazy” (2%). In all, then, half of all unchurched people avoid going to churches because the church provides no real spiritual or practical relevance to their lives.

Table 1.1 – Reasons Why the Unchurched Avoid Church

	<u>all KY unchurched</u>
no time/schedule conflicts/ have to work	26%
not interested in church, churches offer nothing	8
physical disabilities.....	8
dislike people who go to church	6
bad past experience at churches.....	6
family conflicts keep you from church	5
beliefs are different than a church.....	5
don't know of any church to try	4
can worship God without a church	4
no reason, just don't go/got out of habit.....	4
don't believe in churches	2
atheist/don't belief in Jesus or God	2
moved/new to area.....	2
laziness	2
churches only want money	1
transportation issues	1
church's intolerant/strict beliefs	1
problems within church (Catholic sex scandal, denominational fighting, politics).....	1
other	6
not sure	12
 n=	 1004

Perhaps surprising to some pastors, relatively small proportions of the unchurched said they avoid attending because such churches only want money (1%) or because they think the church is too intolerant or strict (1%). Although these perceptions may be more widespread, they are certainly rare when it comes to the top-of-mind reasons why people avoid church.

Some unchurched said that churches have burned them. In all, 1 in every 17 unchurched people indicated the primary reason they don't go to church is because they have had bad experiences at the hands of congregations. Others felt that "church" itself doesn't work for them: 6% of respondents said they don't go to churches because they "don't believe" in them or because they "can worship God without going to church."

Still, some unchurched individuals are "in transition" from one church to another – 1 in every 17 unchurched adults told us that they "don't know of a church to attend" or they "just moved to the area."

Other reasons for avoiding church services include: disliking people who attend church (6%), feeling that their beliefs are different than what churches teach (7%), dealing with family conflicts that keep them from attending (5%), and feeling that the problems within the church are too significant.

Also, the research shows that 9% of the unchurched said they do not attend because they *cannot* attend. In most cases, these relate to physical disabilities, while in other cases, transportation issues.

When you take all of these reasons into account, you can see that people are not avoiding church simply to deflect the personal confrontation with God that might occur (although certainly there is more of that than probably meets the eye). People stay away from churches for their own unique, personal reasons – objections that drive deep to their past experiences and sense of personal needs.

The Spiritual Side of the Unchurched

Another reality about the unchurched that surprises some people is that most maintain that they are tuned into spiritual matters, despite their physical absence from local congregations. In fact, nearly 2 in every 3 unchurched adults (62%) calls themselves “spiritual.”

The most common type of spiritual activity among the unchurched is prayer: nearly 9 in every 10 unchurched adults said they prayed in the last month (85%). Also, nearly half (45%) said they read the Bible in the last month, including 1 in every 3 never-churched adults (32%).

We also discovered that about 1 in every 14 unchurched adults are relying upon unconventional means of spiritual input and output: 8% said they have visited a website for a worship experience in the past month, while 7% indicated they have attended a worship service in someone’s home. Often called “house churches,” the survey question probed specifically about house churches that are not sponsored by a particular church. As shown in Table 1.2, even never-churched adults and those who have not been to a church in the last five years are visiting cyberchurches and house churches in place of congregational churches.

<u>activities in the past month</u>	total	in last 5 yrs	more than 5 yrs	never
• prayed to God	85%	95%	80%	71%
• read the Bible, other than during church service	45	59	36	32
• visited a website for a worship experience	8	11	8	5
• attended a worship service in someone’s home not sponsored by a particular church, known as a house church	7	8	6	6
<u>self-descriptions</u>				
• spiritual	62	73	58	44

It is clear, therefore, that it is huge a error to assume that unchurched people have no forms of spiritual engagement. Beyond that there are three implications of these data. First, prayer is an important common denominator; it is a spiritual activity everyone appreciates and engages in and it may be a key to unlocking spiritual connection with these individuals.

Second, the data show that unchurched people retain strong ties to their Christian roots: in particular, reading the Bible – even if in short, occasional bursts – is not as rare as one might assume. This underscores that many unchurched adults have an appreciation for the Bible (see Chapter 5 for more on this).

Third, the unchurched of Kentucky – just like church and unchurched Americans throughout the country – are experimenting with new forms of spiritual expression. For many, their response to an irrelevant church has been to simply create new environments of spiritual relevance.

Religious Convictions

One of the most unique elements of Kentucky’s unchurched population is the depth of their association with the Christian faith. In all, 82% of the unchurched identified themselves as Christian, which compares to just 54% among the nation’s unchurched. In other words, among Kentucky’s unchurched adults, 4 in every 5 called themselves Christians. But nationwide, that proportion would be closer to 1 in every 2.

Kentucky’s unchurched are also less likely than the national norm to be atheists (13% to 33%, respectively). Just 13% of Kentucky’s unchurched described themselves as atheists or with no religious affiliation. And while 13% of America’s unchurched population was affiliated with a faith other than Christianity, the same was true among just 4% of Kentucky’s residents.

Table 1.3 - The Religious Convictions of Kentucky’s Unchurched

	<i>all adults</i>		<i>unchurched</i>	
	<i>KY</i>	<i>U.S.</i>	<i>KY</i>	<i>U.S.</i>
• self-identified Christian.....	92%	83%	82%	54%
• atheist/no faith.....	7	9	13	33
• other faith.....	3	8	4	13
• made personal commitment to Jesus Christ.....	80	66	67	39
• born again Christian*.....	55	39	30	17

* A “born again Christian” is defined as a person (1) who has made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in their life and (2) who believes they will go to heaven because of they have confessed their sins and have accepted Jesus Christ as their savior.

This depth of commitment to Christianity is also evident when we asked unchurched about past commitment to Jesus Christ. A large proportion of the unchurched – 67% – also maintains that they have “made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in their life.” That is significantly higher than the 39% among America’s unchurched. Furthermore, the research suggests that about 3 in every 10 unchurched adults is a born again Christian (30%) – a person who has made a profession of faith in Christ and confession of personal sins – which is nearly double the rate among the unchurched nationwide (17%).

One key, therefore, to understanding Kentucky’s unchurched population is to remember their strong sense of connection to the Christian faith. As we shall explore in Chapter 2, this does not prevent unchurched people from harboring negative views of Christianity or churches.

Perhaps you are skeptical about the data. Maybe you find it hard to believe that so many of Kentucky’s unchurched align themselves with the Christian faith. But our firm has

conducted other studies that confirm this reality (see Table 1.3). You will notice that Kentucky's entire adult population is, on average, more Christianized than the nation – 92% of Kentuckians are self-identified Christians and 55% are born again Christians (the national figures are 83% and 39%, respectively). The implication is that Kentucky, more so than most states, retains a strong presence and cultural retention of Christian commitment. As we'll get into later, that is not always good news.

The Size of the Unchurched Community

Despite Christianity's strong presence in Kentucky, the size of the unchurched population is actually no different than the national norm: 32% of Kentucky's residents are unchurched, which is statistically on par with the U.S. average (34%). Another way to say this is that even though many things look positive in terms of faith, the size of Kentucky's unchurched population is actually disproportionately large. Moreover, keep these additional sobering realities in mind:

- With generational attrition, there is likely to be a severe decline in church attendance among Kentucky residents over the next two decades.
- Nationally, Christian churches are facing increased hostility in the marketplace and in the culture, a trend that is at work in Kentucky as well.
- Out of Kentucky's 3.1 million adults, there are nearly 1 million unchurched adults residing in the state. Beyond that, another 650,000 adults are nominally church – meaning they are not committed to their current church.
- Nearly 1 in every 2 Kentucky residents is not born again (45%).

There is no shortage of opportunity to positively impact, for Christ, the spiritual climate of Kentucky!

Questions for Reflection

- What assumptions do you have about the unchurched that were challenged in this chapter?
- Does your church have an objective process to identify the spiritual backgrounds of its visitors?
- How sensitive are you to past church experiences? Do you show respect for the fact that some have been hurt deeply by previous church involvement? How do help people deal with the baggage of past hurts?
- Does your church have a program that trains your congregants about how to share their faith in an effective and compelling manner? Does the training address the different viewpoints and expectations of those who have been de-churched as opposed to reaching never-churched adults?
- What are your church's unique strengths in reaching the unchurched? What are some of the unique challenges you face in an environment like Kentucky that has lots of latent Christian commitment?

**CHAPTER 2:
THE HEART AND MIND OF THE UNCHURCHED**

To truly understand others, one should pay attention to how they spend their time and how they talk about themselves. This chapter explores the lifestyles and self-reflections of Kentucky’s unchurched.

For starters, the research revealed that a majority of Kentucky’s unchurched adults (70%) claimed to be “satisfied with their life these days.” However, the unchurched are not without challenges. Nearly half said they were “stressed out” (47%) and “looking for a few good friends” (45%).

One of the intriguing aspects of the research is that Kentucky’s unchurched adults seem to be significantly less at peace with their lives than was true of the nation’s unchurched population. They were less likely to describe themselves as satisfied (70% to 78%) and they were much more likely to be “stressed out” (48% to 34%). Nevertheless, Kentucky’s unchurched were not as likely as the nation’s unchurched to say they were “looking for a few good friends” (45% to 55%).

Table 2.1 - The Psychographic Profile of the Unchurched

% of unchurched in Kentucky and U.S.

	KY	U.S.
• satisfied with your life these days.....	70	78
• stressed out	48	34
• looking for a few good friends	45	55

NA-comparable data not available

Personal Needs

Unchurched people face the same types of challenges as does anyone else. When asked to identify the single most significant challenge they face in life, unchurched Kentuckians identified four categories: health (19%), finances (14%), job-related (12%), and parenting (12%). Unexpectedly, marriage problems were only mentioned by 3% of respondents. Other challenges included non-family relationship difficulties, education-related problems, aging, and busyness. Perhaps not surprisingly, none of the unchurched individuals that we interviewed mentioned spiritual issues. This underscores that people’s primary felt needs relate to practical and relational challenges, not spiritual problems.

We also asked where the unchurched would turn for advice or help in dealing with their most challenging situation. Of course, the predicted solution depended a lot on the type of problem. Those concerned about health were likely to mention a medical doctor. In most cases, though, people identified the close personal relationships around them: their family,

friends, and co-workers (52%). Unchurched people rarely mentioned the church as a source of advice or input. About 1 in every 7 (15%) said they would turn to God or to prayer, while 1 in every 20 (5%) would turn to a pastor or a church. Nearly 1 in every 9 unchurched adults (11%) said they would simply handle the problem by themselves.

Next, the interviewers asked if people would be willing to seek help from a church if they were facing a significant problem in their life. Overall, just 1 in 8 unchurched adults (15%) said they would be “definitely” willing to do so; another 33% were “probably” willing to visit a church. Those most likely to accept help from a church were women, Builders, low-income households, those who have made a commitment to Christ, non-whites, and those who have been churched in the previous five years. The least likely to visit a church included Busters, college graduates, high-income households, those without a personal commitment to Christ, those with an unfavorable view of churches, and those who were churched before, but not in the last five years.

Moral Perspectives

The survey shakes up another misunderstanding about the unchurched: their moral perspectives. While many Christians perceive people outside of the church to be largely unconcerned with matters of morals, the unchurched think of themselves in very different terms. Nearly 9 in every 10 said that they believe they are moral (87%). This helps explain one reason why the unchurched react negatively to the appeals of churches. They already think of themselves as moral individuals, and the moral advice from church leaders, rightly or wrongly, rings hollow.

Of course, just because people think of themselves as “moral” has little correlation with their ability or willingness to make decisions in a biblical manner. The survey delved into the moral perspectives of the unchurched by asking them to identify how they make moral or ethical decisions. Interviewers read six different ways of deciding upon such matters and asked respondents to choose the one that best describes them. Not surprisingly, a minority said they make moral decisions by “following a set of specific principles or standards you believe in” – although this was the most commonly selected response, just 40% of them choose this alternative.

But a majority of the unchurched embraces some other form of moral decision-making. Some said that they would “do whatever feels right or comfortable in that situation” (21%); that they would “do whatever will produce the most positive outcome for you personally” (13%); that they would “do whatever will make the most people happy or create the least conflict” (9%); that they would “do whatever they think their family or friends would expect them to do (4%); or that they would “do what they believe most other people would do in that situation” (3%). So most Kentuckians subscribe to a self-defined form of morality.

Furthermore, even among those who said they follow a specific set of principles, we found that only 1 in 3 identified the basis of those principles to be the Bible, God, or church teachings. In other words, only 13% of unchurched adults said they follow a set of moral principles that are based upon their faith and just 8% said the basis for their moral decisions is the Bible. Most others said they base their standards on values their parents taught them, personal experience, personal feelings, logic and reasoning, and the law.

It seems there is both good news and bad news embedded within these numbers. In terms of good news, realize that unchurched Kentuckians are more likely than the nation's unchurched to say they make moral decisions based upon the a set of faith principles – 13% to 6%. This represents at least 1 in every 8 unchurched Kentuckians who have a solid basis for moral behavior in a culture of shifting values.

The bad news is that the vast majority of Kentucky's unchurched – despite thinking of themselves as moral people – respond to moral choices by doing whatever comes easiest. It's moral pragmatism; whatever works is good enough. In their own words, they make their choices based upon fulfilling others' expectations, minimizing conflict, and maximizing personal comfort.

One final comment: although the moral clarity of the unchurched leaves a lot to be desired, it is not much different than the moral compass of churchgoers. Our research reveals that a minority of churchgoers claims to make decisions based upon a specific set of standards as described in the Bible. So the moral fortitude of most churchgoers is also hit or miss.

Table 2.2 - The Moral Decision-Making of the Unchurched

% of unchurched in Kentucky and U.S.

Question: Changing topics for a moment, think about the choices you face everyday. People make their decisions in different ways. When you are faced with a moral or ethical choice, which ONE of the following best describes how you, yourself, decide what to do?

	<u>KY</u>	<u>U.S.</u>
* do whatever will make people happy or create the least conflict.....	9%	11%
* do whatever you think your family or friends would expect you to do.....	4	8
* follow a set of specific principles or standards you believe in, that serve as guidelines for your behavior.....	40	39
* do what you believe most other people would do in that situation	3	4
* do whatever feels right or comfortable in that situation.....	21	24
* or do whatever will produce the most positive outcome for you	13	10
* other	3	1
* not sure	6	3

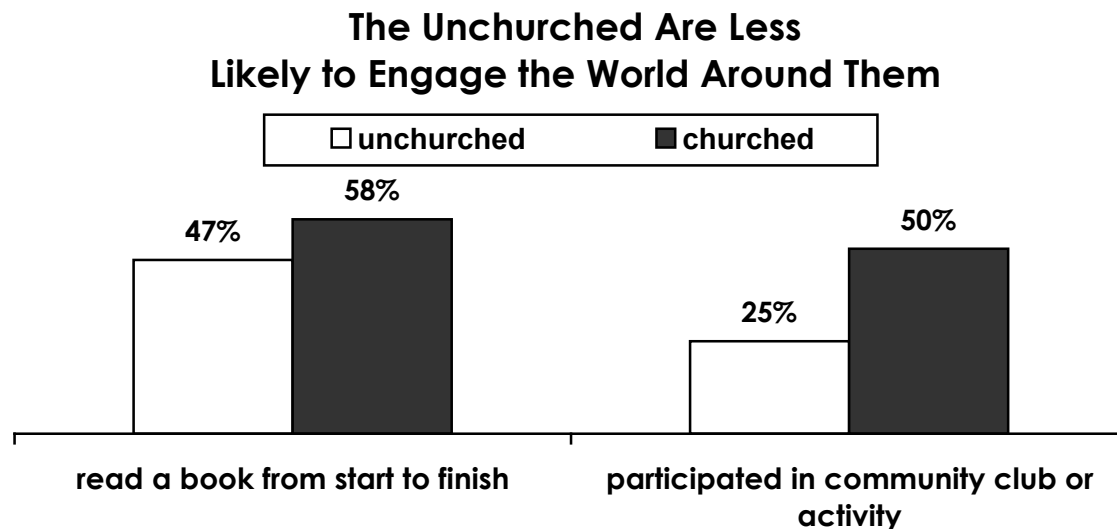
Question: What is the basis or source of those principles and standards that you think about? In other words, where do those standards and principles come from? (ONLY ASKED AMONG THOSE WHO SAID THEY "FOLLOW A SET OF PRINCIPLES")

	<u>KY</u>	<u>U.S.</u>
* values taught by your parents	36%	37%
* the Bible.....	20	12
* God	10	4
* personal experience	11	11
* personal feelings.....	8	13
* logic and reasoning	5	*
* not sure	3	9
* other.....	2	9
* church teachings/religious teaching.....	2	*
* the law	1	1

Matters of Lifestyle

Here are two interesting snapshots of unchurched leisure time. Nearly half of the unchurched (47%) had read a book from start to finish in the past six months. Also 25% said they participated in a community or neighborhood club or activity in the same timeframe.

Although we were unable to explore any other leisure activities due to limits on the survey length, the interesting thing about these two behaviors is their comparison to churched Kentuckians. For their part, churched Kentuckians were more likely to have read a book (58% to 47%) and twice as likely to have participated in a community endeavor (50% to 25%). This confirms that unchurched individuals not only disassociate themselves from churches, but they are generally less likely to connect with their communities or to ideas. This is not particularly uncommon, based upon our national research. But it does signify that churches have a challenge in reaching them that goes beyond mere objection to a church. They avoid participation with their communities.



Demographics

The research also provides insights into the demographics of the unchurched. Here are the highlights:

- Education – Kentucky’s unchurched adults are more likely than churched adults to have a four-year college degree (21% to 17%). The educational attainment of Kentucky’s unchurched lagged only slightly behind that of the nation’s unchurched population (24%).
- Income – In general, income levels emerged as statistically identical between churched and unchurched Kentuckians. These income levels were slightly lower than that of the national average.

Table 2.3 - The Demographics of the Unchurched

	<u>Kentucky churched</u>	<u>Kentucky unchurched</u>	<u>U.S. unchurched</u>
<u>education</u>			
• high school or less	54	54	49
• some college	29	26	25
• college graduate	17	21	24
<u>income</u>			
• less than \$25K	29	36	32
• \$25K-\$50K	42	33	34
• \$50K+	29	31	34
<u>marital status</u>			
• currently married.....	63	56	42
• not currently married	37	44	58
• ever divorced.....	27	37	27
<u>ethnicity</u>			
• white.....	90	93	63
• non-white	10	7	37
<u>parent of a child under 18</u>			
• yes.....	39	35	33
• no.....	61	65	67
<u>ideology</u>			
• mostly conservative	39	23	23
• mostly liberal.....	10	15	16
• moderate	40	50	53
<u>age</u>			
• Mosaic	2	3	5
• Buster.....	20	31	46
• Boomer	39	44	32
• Builder	30	17	13
• Senior	10	4	4
• Mean age	53 yrs	47 yrs	41 yrs.
n=	202	1004	1007

- Marital status – Churched adults were more likely than unchurched adults to be married (63% to 56%). In the U.S., unchurched adults are even less likely to be married (42%). Among Kentuckians, churched adults were less likely than unchurched adults to have ever been divorced (27% to 37%). The proportion of divorcees among Kentucky’s unchurched is an intriguing area of need.
- Ethnicity – The ethnic composition of Kentucky’s churched and unchurched segments are predominantly white (90% and 93%, respectively). Nationally, just 63% of the unchurched population is white.
- Parenthood – Despite high marriage levels, the percent of Kentucky’s residents who are parents of children under 18 was not significantly higher than the national norm: in all, 39% of churched adults are parents, compared with 35% of the unchurched.
- Political ideology – The political ideology of churchgoers was much more conservative (39%) than was that of Kentucky’s unchurched adults (23%), who preferred to describe themselves as moderate (50%). The ideological profile of Kentucky’s unchurched adults was very similar to that of the national unchurched population.

- Age – The research confirms that churchgoers (mean age of 53) are older than the unchurched (47 years). Actually, the U.S. unchurched population is even younger (41 years). Not surprisingly, 79% of Kentucky’s churchgoers are ages 40 and older, while only 65% of the unchurched are over 40.

Questions for Reflection

- What assumptions about the unchurched were accurate? What surprised you?
- The unchurched are younger, more educated, and politically moderate compared to churchgoers. How are you preparing your congregation to deal with the demographics of the unchurched?
- Are people in your congregation genuinely interested in welcoming new people to their church or are they comfortable with the church as stands? Will they be able to accept people who think differently?
- If the unchurched are less likely than the churchd to participate in any type of activity outside their home, what is your church doing to meet the spiritual needs of these people – to meet them where they “live”?
- What is your expectation about the moral views and behaviors of the unchurched? Does your church have an implicit or even an explicit expectation that the unchurched should act morally *before* accepting the lordship of Christ in their lives?
- When you really think about it, how well do the leaders and laity of your church extend grace to those who are not yet true followers of Christ? How can you improve in this area?

CHAPTER 3:
THE IMAGE OF CHRISTIANITY

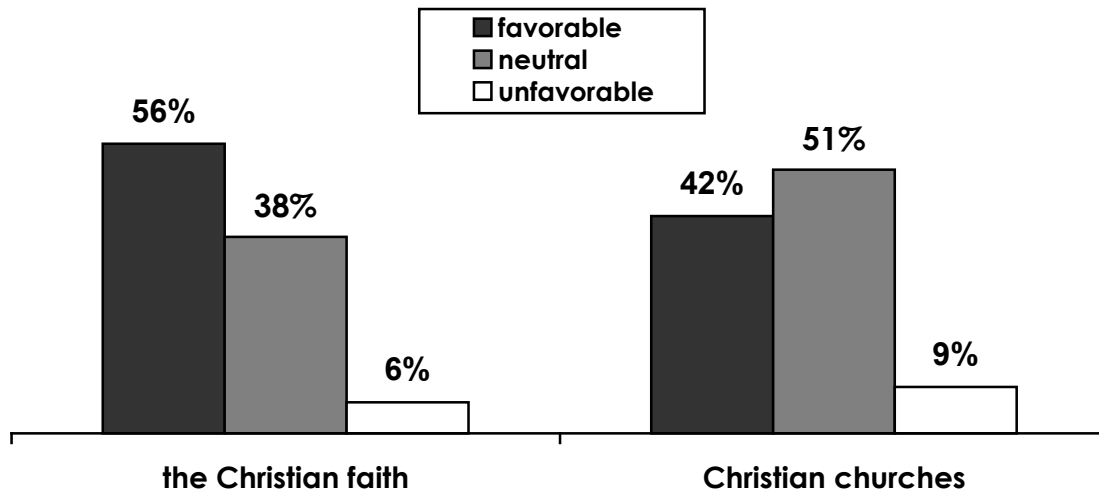
When people think about Christianity, whether they realize it or not, they possess a set of perceptions about the faith (even you, right now). These perceptions dictate how they feel about the faith and its adherents – and it influences their willingness to embrace Christianity as part of their own life.

What, then, are the perceptions that exist about Christianity and about the churches affiliated with that faith? Do the unchurched think of the Christian faith in favorable or unfavorable terms? The research set out to explore these issues.

More Favorable Than You Might Think

There is another myth about the unchurched exploded by this project: that they tend to have unfavorable impressions of the Christian faith and of Christian churches. In fact, only 6% of the unchurched said their views of the Christian faith are unfavorable and only 9% said their impressions of local Christian churches are negative. Moreover, those who held “very unfavorable impressions” were quite rare: just 1 in 33 felt that way about Christianity (3%) and only 1 in 20 about churches (4%).

Perceptions of the Christian Faith and Churches



Even among those unchurched adults who have never made a personal commitment to Christ, we still find very little overt negative imagery regarding Christianity – just 12% held unfavorable impressions.

But that does not mean that the unchurched maintain pristine perceptions of churches and of Christianity. While a slim majority (56%) maintains good impressions of the faith, nearly 2 in every 5 (38%) describe themselves as neutral. When we asked specifically about local churches, feelings of indifference (51%) were more common than were favorable images (42%).

Table 3.1 – What The Unchurched Think of Christianity

Question: Based on whatever you know or feel about the Christian faith in general, do you have a favorable or unfavorable impression of Christianity – or is your impression neutral?

	total	--previously churched?--		
		<5 yrs	5+ yrs	no
very favorable.....	43%	59%	45%	26%
somewhat favorable	13	12	14	12
neutral	35	26	31	50
somewhat unfavorable.....	3	1	5	2
very unfavorable	3	1	3	4
not sure.....	3	2	3	6

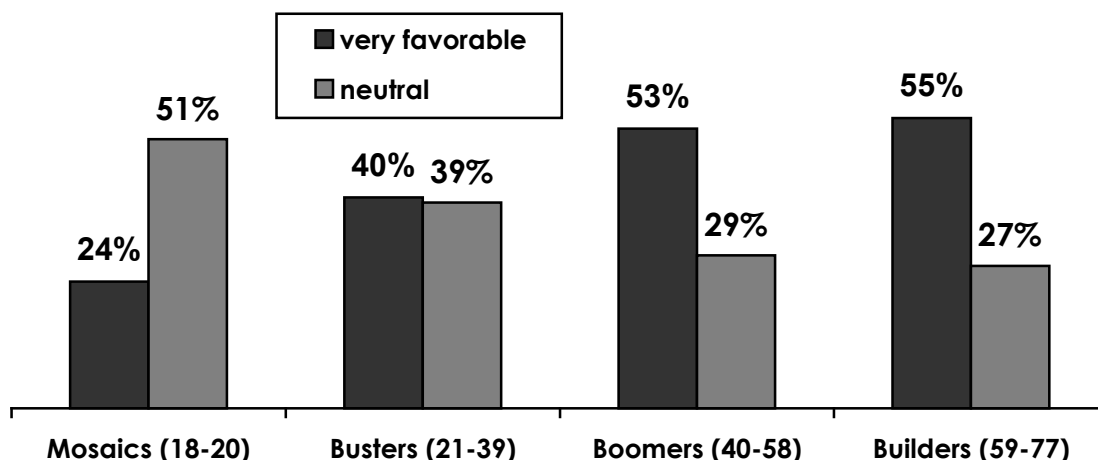
Question: Based on what you know about the Christian churches in your community, do you have a favorable or unfavorable impression of your local Christian churches – or is your impression neutral?

	total	--previously churched?--		
		<5 yrs	5+ yrs	no
very favorable.....	29%	38%	24%	19%
somewhat favorable	13	15	14	14
neutral	45	38	46	54
somewhat unfavorable.....	5	3	7	3
very unfavorable	4	3	5	2
not sure.....	6	4	5	8

This brings up an important observation: the Christian faith is more favorably positioned than are Christian churches. In particular, the de-churched were much more likely to perceive Christianity favorably than to think positively about churches. Notice for instance in Table 3.1 that 59% of those de-churched for more than five years think favorably of Christianity; however, only 38% think favorably of churches. Perhaps their negative experiences are creating this negative reaction (more on this in a moment).

Another intriguing revelation is the fact that never-churched adults were highly likely to express feelings of indifference regarding both Christianity (56%) and churches (62%). Young people – who for the first time are starting their religious explorations at a place other than Christianity – are driving much of this indifference.

Perceptions of the Christian Faith Differ Greatly by Generation



Imagery

The study also explored nine specific attributes of Christian churches and five attributes of Christians. Some of the statements were centered on positive elements – e.g., that it offers hope, that it is caring, that Christians are nice people, etc. Other aspects focused on negative perceptions – such as that churches are too concerned about money, that they are not relevant, that Christians are hypocritical, and so forth.

We discovered that unchurched people generally embrace the positive imagery in greater proportion than they do the negative perceptions. For instance, Christian churches were described in large numbers as offering hope to people (86%), caring (86%), friendly (84%), places where you can connect to God (78%), and actively serving the needy (73%). Just 60% of respondents felt that Christian churches were accepting of people with different beliefs.

On the negative side, 58% felt that churches are too concerned about raising money, 36% described churches as not relevant to their life, and 29% said the church feels like a club only certain people can join.

Churchgoers are generally perceived as “nice people” – a description embraced by 85% of unchurched respondents. However, there was a notable drop-off in the percent of unchurched Kentuckians – 62% – who said that churchgoers “show genuine interest in you as a person.” A majority of the unchurched also felt as though churchgoers are judgmental (61%), hypocritical (57%), and intolerant of other people’s beliefs (52%). The bottomline is that the unchurched hold deeply conflicting perceptions about churches and churchgoers – underscored by their feelings of personal indifference.

Interestingly, as shown in Table 3.2, the people who held the least favorable views of churches and Christians were de-churched adults who have not attended in more than five years. These formerly churched adults seem to be basing their perceptions of churches on bad experiences from their past. They were less likely to perceive churches as helping the

needy or as accepting of others; they were also more likely to say that churches are too focused on money and that it feels like an exclusive club. Similarly, their perceptions of churchgoers were also more jaded than others; they were consistently more likely to describe churchgoers as judgmental, hypocritical and intolerant of other's beliefs.

On the other hand, the *never*-churched crowd actually embraced many of the favorable imagery about churches and churchgoers. Their one soft spot, compared to those who were formerly churched, was that they were less likely than average to say that churches offer hope to people.

Table 3.2 – The Imagery of Churches and Churchgoers

Question: I'm going to read some phrases people could use to describe churches. Based on your experiences or impressions of churches, in general, please tell me how well each term describes churches that are affiliated with the Christian faith. Does the phrase (READ PHRASE) describe churches?

	total	--previously churched?--		
		<5 yrs	5+ yrs	no
offers hope to people	86%	92%	85%	79%
caring	86	91	81	87
friendly	84	91	83	82
a place where you can connect to God	78	89	75	76
actively involved in serving the needy.....	73	80	68	74
accepting of people with different beliefs.....	60	73	51	56
too concerned about raising money	58	52	64	53
not relevant for your life today	36	23	39	38
seems like a club only certain people can join	29	23	36	24

Question: Think about the people you know who are churchgoers. Which of the phrases I read do you think accurately describe churchgoers. Does the phrase (READ PHRASE) describe churchgoers?

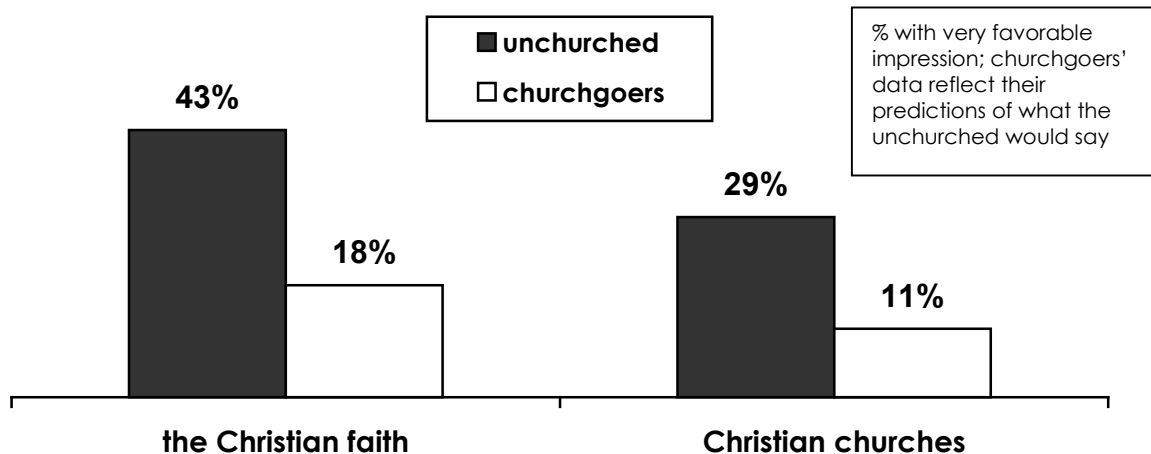
	total	--previously churched?--		
		<5 yrs	5+ yrs	no
nice people	85%	89%	87%	81%
show genuine interest in you as a person.....	62	73	59	63
judgmental.....	61	49	73	53
hypocritical.....	57	48	66	55
intolerant of other people's beliefs	52	45	58	45

The Perspectives of Churched Adults

Let's now examine the issue of the image of the Christian faith from another angle: what *churched* people predict the unchurched would say. We asked a sample of 200 churchgoers to anticipate how unchurched people would respond to the survey questions. Were their predictions accurate? In many ways, yes, but there were some significant gaps.

Most notably, churchgoers would be surprised to learn how favorably the unchurched perceive Christian churches and especially Christianity. The expectations of churchgoers were overly pessimistic when it came to these aspects.

Churchgoers Expect a More Negative Reaction Among the Unchurched



In other ways, there was a great deal of similarity between the views of the unchurched and what churchgoers expected they might say. On 9 of the 14 attribute statements (see Table 3.3), the difference was within the range of sampling error (plus or minus seven percentage points), suggesting that churchgoers are able to provide a fairly accurate self-assessment in these areas.

There are a few areas of difference, however. Churchgoers provided an overly pessimistic rating when it came to “churches offering hope to people,” “churches being caring,” and “churches not being relevant.” In each of these cases, the unchurched were *more* favorable toward churches than churchgoers’ anticipated.

Churchgoers were also optimistic when it came to “churches seeming like a club that only certain people can join” and “churchgoers being genuinely interested in the unchurched.” In both of these cases, church attenders gave themselves overly flattering marks. This drives to the heart of the challenge that Christians face in reaching the unchurched: facilitating genuine, “agenda-less” relationships. The unchurched are skeptical of the relational overtures they receive from many Christians, while churchgoers are unaware of the perception they are creating.

Notice, too, that churchgoers accurately predict that they would be perceived as hypocritical, judgmental and intolerant of others’ beliefs. The survey did not permit us enough time to explore whether churchgoers felt those perceptions were justified or not. However, since perception equals reality, Christians will have a difficult time putting aside those accusations of hypocrisy and judgmentalism. The problem is also compounded by the fact that churchgoers have to deal with the psychological barrier of knowing that, in many quarters, they are perceived in very unfavorable terms.

Table 3.3 – What Churchgoers Predict the Unchurched Would Say

	KY unchrd	KY chrchd	Are churchgoers' perceptions accurate?
impression of the Christian faith			
very favorable.....	43%	18%	no, too pessimistic
all unfavorable.....	6	19	no, too pessimistic
impression of Christian churches			
very favorable.....	29	11	no, too pessimistic
all unfavorable.....	9	18	no, too pessimistic
attributes of Christian churches			
offers hope to people	86	78	no, too pessimistic
caring	86	77	no, too pessimistic
friendly	84	80	yes
a place where you can connect to God	78	77	yes
actively involved in serving the needy	73	75	yes
accepting of people with different beliefs.....	60	56	yes
too concerned about raising money	58	60	yes
not relevant for your life today	36	48	no, too pessimistic
seems like a club only certain people can join	29	21	no, too optimistic
attributes of churchgoers			
nice people	85	90	yes
show genuine interest in you as a person.....	62	72	no, too optimistic
judgmental.....	61	55	yes
hypocritical.....	57	59	yes
intolerant of other people's beliefs	52	50	yes
n=	1004	202	

Baptist Imagery

Here is another myth busted by the research: Southern Baptists are not widely or specifically spurned by the unchurched. The study asked respondents if “Southern Baptist” raised any specific concerns in their mind. Overall, we found that three-quarters of respondents (73%) had no such reservations. Among never-churched adults, 79% were unconcerned about the Southern Baptist label.

We also asked respondents if they felt that Southern Baptist churches are different from other churches in some way or whether all churches are pretty much the same regardless of the denomination. A plurality of unchurched adults contends that all churches are pretty much the same (47% offered this perspective). Others were split: 18% felt that Southern Baptist churches are different, in a favorable manner, while 15% said Southern Baptist churches bring specific unfavorable images to mind. One-fifth of all unchurched adults (21%) said they had no opinion on the matter.

The groups for whom Southern Baptist created negative concerns were college graduates (41%), political liberals (39%), those with incomes of \$50,000 or more (31%), and those who had never made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ (27%). Age was not a factor in terms of impressions of Southern Baptists.

The bottomline is that the Southern Baptist “brand” faces some, but not widespread, perceptual challenges. Still, even though most unchurched adults have no specific objections to Southern Baptist churches, realize that this does not dampen the criticism the denomination receives from the most vociferous of opponents. Moreover, nearly one in every 4 unchurched adults has at least some level of reluctance to participating in a Southern Baptist church.

Table 3.4 – The Brand Image of Southern Baptists

Question: There are many different types of churches these days. I would like to ask you about one church denomination in particular, that is the Southern Baptist denomination. When you hear the term Southern Baptist does that raise any specific concerns in your mind about the church or not necessarily?

	total	--previously churched?--		
		<5 yrs	5+ yrs	no
yes	22%	21%	27%	17%
no	73	76	67	79
not sure.....	5	3	6	4

Question: Think about your impressions of Southern Baptist churches in comparison to other types of churches, such as Methodist or Presbyterian churches. Do you believe that Southern Baptist churches are significantly different from other types of churches, or are all churches pretty much the same regardless of denomination? (IF SEE AS DIFFERENT, ASK: Do you have a more favorable or less favorable impression of Southern Baptist churches compared to other churches, like the Methodist or Presbyterian churches?)

	total	--previously churched?--		
		<5 yrs	5+ yrs	no
pretty much the same	47%	49%	44%	46%
different: more favorable	18	23	18	13
different: less favorable	15	12	17	12
not sure.....	21	17	21	30

Questions for Reflection

- Although most unchurched adults in Kentucky have favorable perceptions of Christianity, there are nearly 100,000 unchurched adults who do, in fact, hold explicitly unfavorable views of churches – and many more harbor negative images related to specific facets of the church’s work. Has your church taken steps to objectively evaluate what perceptions your church leaves with visitors?
- Does your church spend time coaching congregants on how to interact with unchurched people? Where does that coaching occur? Does the pastor champion evangelism methods that demonstrate genuine love and concern for people?
- Churchgoers have generally accurate views of how the unchurched think of them. Is it good news or bad news that most churchgoers say they would be perceived as hypocritical, judgmental, and intolerant?

- Do you feel that the Baptist “brand” is a problem in your area? What have you learned about addressing that issue? How do you balance respect for your tradition and denomination while minimizing things that distract from the core message of Jesus Christ?

- Are you personally developing friendships with unchurched people – just to listen to their needs and perspectives? If the unchurched perceive churchgoers as lacking genuineness, are your activities and attitudes helping or hurting this perception?

CHAPTER 4: CREATING CHURCHES OF RELEVANCE

As we explore the types of churches that the unchurched would be willing to attend, the most fundamental reality is that there are as many preferences as there are unchurched people! For one thing, people legitimately have unique needs and preferences. For another, consumer culture is deepening people's desire to find spiritual experiences and resources that fit them uniquely. Call it "My-Size" Spirituality.

While it is not possible – or even desirable – for churches to cater to individual preferences, neither can they be all things to all people. Creating a church of relevance, then, requires starting with a clear sense of what God has called *your* church to be and reaching people who will find real points of spiritual connection in that unique context.

Church Preferences

To assess the types of churches people would consider attending, we asked respondents to choose between eight pairs of options (for example: traditional hymns or contemporary, and so on). For starters, the data underscore people's wide-ranging preferences: only one of the 16 options was strongly preferred by at least half of the respondents. So people certainly have disparate ideas of what a church should look like. Here is a rundown of what we learned:

→ **church size** – Church leaders are often surprised that the unchurched say they would prefer small churches rather than large or megachurches. Kentucky's unchurched are no different: the option that attracted more than half of respondents (52%) was the preference to attend a church of 100 attenders rather than one with 300 (10%). This stems in large part from people's desire to be involved with a group of people that is small enough to be relationally tight-knit. Even though people resonate to small-church environment, many still end up at larger churches because: (1) many small churches are essentially inhospitable environments for new people; (2) large churches generally work hard at being welcoming; and (3) large churches tend to have more multi-faceted options that people appreciate.

→ **music style** – 41% of the unchurched said they would prefer a church with traditional hymns, compared to 17% who wanted contemporary worship music. Compared to national averages, Kentuckians were much more likely than average to gravitate to hymns (41% to 25%).

→ **musical accompaniment** – The unchurched expressed a slight edge toward a choir accompanied by an organ (36%), but 21% of the unchurched strongly preferred a singer leading the congregation, accompanied by a band playing with electric instruments. Kentuckians appeared to be more attuned to this issue than were unchurched adults nationwide, who were less likely to prefer either choirs or a band (29% to 10%, respectively).

Table 4.1 –The Types of Churches Preferred by the Unchurched

% of unchurched in Kentucky and U.S.

Question: There are many different styles of worship services at Christian churches these days. Think about the type of church that would be most appealing to you, personally. I'm going to read pairs of church aspects. Please tell me which of the two options in each pair I read would be more appealing to you if you were looking for a church to attend. The (first/next) choice is either a church (READ OPTION A) or a church (READ OPTION B).

% who strongly prefer each option

	KY	U.S.
church size		
OPTION A: with less than 100 people attending.....	52%	30%
OPTION B: with more than 300 people attending.....	10	7

music style		
OPTION A: service with traditional hymns or	41	25
OPTION B: service with contemporary worship music	17	15

musical accompaniment		
OPTION A: with a choir that is accompanied by an organ	36	29
OPTION B: with a singer who leads the congregation in songs, accompanied by a band playing electric instruments	21	10

service style		
OPTION A: with a formal worship service	26	17
OPTION B: with an informal worship service	37	24

participation		
OPTION A: service that has everyone participate throughout the service.....	47	33
OPTION B: service with little participation, where the people watch the leaders conduct the service. 19	19	17

what about the kids?		
OPTION A: service where children attend with their parents, and there is a section of the service geared to children	49	41
OPTION B: service just for adults, with children enrolled in classes that meet elsewhere during the adult service	20	25

congregational response		
OPTION A: where people raise their hands, applaud and make other verbal affirmations or noises during the musical portion of the worship service.....	36	17
OPTION B: where people are reserved and orderly during the service.....	30	34

sermons		
OPTION A: where the sermons address issues or concerns that people face in their lives	40	45
OPTION B: where the sermons are based on studying a specific book of the Bible, with a verse by verse explanation of those passages.....	22	14

→ **service style** – The unchurched wanted an informal worship service more than they wanted a formal style (37% to 26%). This was similar to the selection of U.S. unchurched adults, however, the national sample was less interested in either option.

→ **participation** – People were more likely to desire a worship service where everyone participates throughout the service (47%) than a service with little participation, where the people watch the leaders conduct the service (19%). Kentuckians were more likely to want a participatory service than was true of unchurched adults nationwide (47% to 33%).

→ **what about kids?** – In keeping with the notion of participation, the unchurched preferred a service where children attend with their parents and there is a section of the service geared for the children (49%). One-fifth of the unchurched wanted a service just for adults, with children enrolled in separate classes (20%).

→ **congregational response** – The closest of the eight pairs, respondents were virtually split in their preference between a service where people raise their hands, applaud and make other verbal affirmations during the musical portion of the service (36%) or a service where people are reserved and orderly during the service (30%). This was the one pair of options where Kentucky's unchurched adults were different than the norm: in other states, there is more lopsided preference for services where people are reserved and orderly (34% to 17%).

→ **sermons** – The unchurched were likely to prefer a church where sermons address issues or concerns that people face in their lives (40%), rather than sermons that are based on studying a specific book of the Bible, with a verse-by-verse explanation of those passages (22%).

There are several points to keep in mind as you sift through church preferences:

First, you may have realized that the preferences do not add to 100%. That's because many respondents said they don't know, don't care, or do not have strong preference about the type of church they attend. Do not overlook the fact that most people are essentially indifferent on these matters – even many of those who expressed a preference.

Second, do not be tempted to conclude that small percentages mean that these types of churches are unappealing to the unchurched. Even 10% represents nearly 100,000 unchurched people. Furthermore, do not fall into the trap of assuming your "team" won if your church happens to appeal to the larger segment. The Kingdom of Christ needs all types of churches ministering to all types of people. And, besides, preferences change so you may soon find yourself in the minority.

Third, you might have been surprised to learn that unchurched Kentuckians still respond to traditional elements, such as hymns, formal services, and subdued congregational responses. Part of the explanation for that is that people often base their preferences on what they know, rather than what they might like. Ultimately, people want a church that provides them with moorings to their past, but that also "feels" contemporary, lively, and inviting. Ministry, even in a more traditional church, must stay fresh and purposeful.

Finally, there are, of course, dozens of other dimensions that we did not have time to address in this research – how to treat visitors, church marketing preferences, youth

ministry, family programs, facility preferences, and more. Your church will have to evaluate its unique context to determine an approach that works well.

Exploring Preferences

This is what we discovered about the types of people who expressed above-average interest in each option:

Dimension	Option	Who was most likely to prefer this type of church?
church size	100 or less → →	women, Busters
	300+ → → →	Mosaics, singles, non-whites
music style	hymns → →	Builders, high school or less, non-parents, political conservatives already have commitment to Christ, churched in the last five yrs.
	contemporary →	parents, Busters, Mosaics, singles
accompaniment	choir/organ →	Builders, Seniors, recently churched
	worship leader →	parents, Mosaics, Busters, singles
service style	formal → →	Builders, churched in the last five years, non-whites
	informal → →	women, Boomers, whites,
participation	participation →	women, no college, low income, parents, non-white
	people watch →	high income, never made commitment to Christ
what about kids?	kids with parents →	those who have made commitment to Christ
	kids separate →	Seniors, Mosaics, those with unfavorable impression of Christianity
congregational response	applause, etc. →	Busters, some college, non-white, parents, committed to Christ
	reserved → →	college grads, Seniors, Builders, whites, non-parents
sermons	life issues → →	Mosaics, Busters, singles, college grads, high-income adults, parents
	expository → →	Builders, Seniors, political conservatives, low-income adults

Points of Entry

The research also explored the programs, services, and events in which the unchurched might enter – or, more accurately – re-enter a church. Worship services still represent the most commonly anticipated entry point. Overall, 43% of Kentucky’s unchurched said they would attend a worship service. Another 20% would attend a special event. Only 8% indicated they would be interested in a community outreach program, which made Kentucky’s residents less responsive than the norm (15%). Other possible entry points included the Sunday school class (7%), a class taught by the pastor (7%), and a small group Bible study that meets in someone’s home (4%).

Table 4.2 – Entry Points for the Unchurched

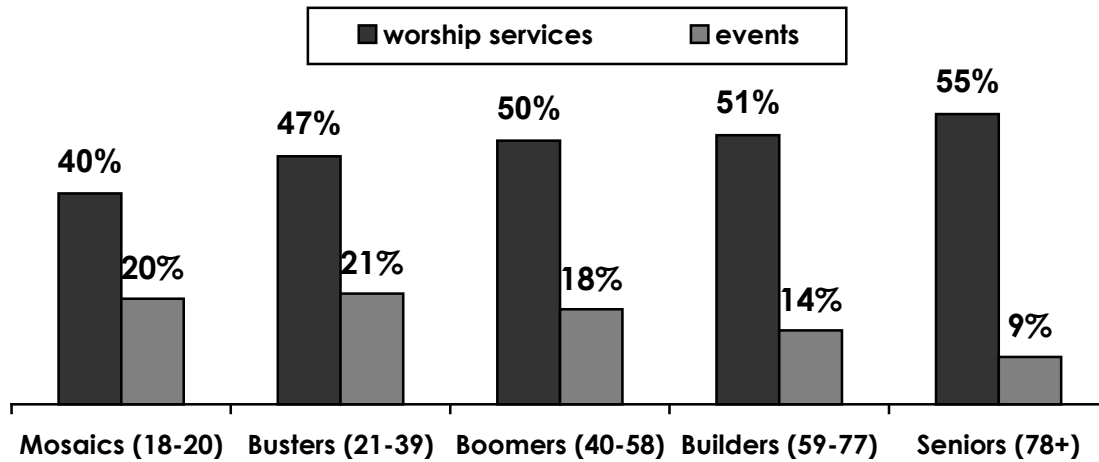
% of unchurched in Kentucky and U.S.

Question: Suppose you decided that you wanted to be involved in a church. What would be the most appealing way for you to get involved in that church? Would it be through (READ OPTIONS)?

	KY	U.S.	Who is most interested?
- attending their worship services	43%	40%	..... nominally churched
- by attending a special event held by the church for members and non-members	20	19	..... non-born agains
- participating in a community outreach program	8	15	..... Mosaics, Busters, liberals
- attending a Sunday school class	7	4	..... Builders or Seniors
- attending a small class with other visitors that is taught by a church pastor to learn more about the church	7	6	..... non-born agains
- attending a small group Bible study that meets in someone's home during the week.....	4	5	..... no significant patterns
- not sure / depends	8	11	

Notice in Table 4.2 that each entry point has diverse attraction to different groups. Worship services were particularly appealing to the nominally churched, while non-born again adults expressed above-average interest in special events and a class taught by the pastor. Mosaics, Busters, political liberals, and college graduates were more interested than average in community outreach. Builders and Seniors resonated to Sunday school more than their peers. Worship services have decreasing interest by age, with Mosaics the least likely of any generation to attend services. Still, even among Mosaics, worship services are the most common entry point.

People's Interest in Worship Services and Events Differs by Generation



The Picture of a Preferred Church

We also asked respondents to identify the type of church that would most likely fit their needs and style – a church that focuses mostly on teaching people the Bible; one that focuses on serving the needy; one that emphasizes friendships, or a congregation that focuses on leading people to Christ. Kentucky’s unchurched were most likely to select a church that focuses on leading people to Christ (33% of respondents selected this option, which was more common than was true nationally, 24%). Not surprisingly, 81% of those who preferred this type of church had already made a commitment to Christ. They also tended to be political conservatives, recently churched, and comparatively low-income.

The second most appealing was a church that taught people what the Bible says (26%), which was also selected more often in Kentucky than nationally (21%). Here again, most of these people (80%) had already made a commitment to Christ.

Table 4.3 – The Unchurched Describe Their Preferred Church

Question: If you were examining different churches to find one that fit your needs and your style, would you be more interested in (READ OPTIONS)?

	KY	U.S.	Who is most interested?
- a church that focuses mostly on teaching people what the Bible says	26%	21%	...born again
- a church that focuses mostly on serving needy people in the area	20	28	.....Mosaics, liberals,
- a church that emphasizes friendships among its members.....	10	14	.....Busters, college grads, non-X
- a church that focuses mostly on leading people to accept Jesus Christ as their savior	33	24	.....born again, recently churched
- not sure	11	13	

Another 20% of respondents said they would prefer a church that focuses on serving the needy. This type of church resonated among Mosaics, males, college grads, upper-income adults, political liberals, and those who had not been a church attender for more than five years. Half of those who preferred this type of church had made a commitment to Christ.

Finally, 10% of Kentucky's unchurched wanted to attend a church that focuses emphasizes friendships among its members. This type of church generated above-average appeal among Busters and college graduates. In all, 61% had made a personal commitment to Christ.

The implication is that if you want to attract unchurched people who have never made a commitment to Christ, the church should be positioned as one that serves the needy or as one that emphasizes friendships among congregants. In contrast, churches whose calling card is their Bible teaching or their evangelism emphasis tend to attract people who have already made a commitment to Christ. Naturally, every church should focus on teaching people the Bible and emphasize evangelism. But those elements may not be the identifiers used in talking to unchurched people who are still weighing the merits of commitment to Christ.

Table 4.4 – What the Unchurched Want to Be Called

% of unchurched in Kentucky and U.S.

Question: There are many words that people use to describe themselves spiritually or in terms of their religious leanings. I'm going to mention just a few terms that are sometimes used to describe people who do not regularly attend churches. For each word, please tell me whether you feel it accurately describes you or not. The (first/next) term is (READ TERM). Does that term accurately describe you, or not?

% who feel the term is accurate of them

	KY	US
inquirer.....	56%	52%
explorer	54	48
seeker	53	40
non-Christian	20	20
lost	20	11
prodigal.....	18	12
non-believer	11	10

Question: If someone were to refer to you in a spiritual sense as "lost," would you consider that to be a positive term, a negative term or neutral?

	KY	US
positive	9%	5%
negative.....	55	56
neutral	31	36
not sure.....	5	3

How to Refer to the Unchurched

Many church leaders, to the peril of their efforts in reaching the unchurched, use labels *for* the unchurched that are not appreciated *by* the unchurched. The research points out that the terms inquirer (56% of the unchurched resonated to this term), explorer (54%), and seeker (53%) were acceptable to most Kentucky's unchurched. But the labels that church leaders use more often – such as non-Christian (20%), lost (20%), prodigal (18%), and non-believer (11%) – were not deemed accurate by most respondents. (See Table 4.4 above.)

We asked specifically how they would feel if someone were to refer to them as “lost,” in a spiritual sense. Most (55%) said they would perceive the term to be negative, 31% said it would neutral, and 9% felt it was positive.

In comparison with national norms, the only differences included the fact that Kentuckians were slightly more likely than the norm to accept the term seeker (53% to 40% nationally) and the phrase “lost” (20% to 11%).

Questions for Reflection

- Do your church's leaders pay special attention to the words and phrases used to describe the unchurched? Do they make a concerted effort in the public services to use language that communicates to a broad audience?
- If everyone has unique preferences in the type of church they look for, what preferences among the unchurched will your church meet, naturally and effectively? What preferences does your church not meet effectively? Are there things you wish your church did better to appeal to the unchurched?
- Is your church insular or inviting? Oriented to outreach or to self-service? When was the last time your church specifically evaluated how welcoming it is to outsiders? If recently, what did you learn about the church and how did your church respond to the feedback? If not, what steps can you take to evaluate this?
- Have you identified other churches in your community that – beyond being solid theologically – also provide the worship services or styles that your church does not offer? Do you intentionally and gratefully work with other churches in your community by referring people to them who may be a better fit in their church?
- What are your church's strongest and weakest entry points? What have you learned about your unique context regarding the appeal of worship services? Events? Is your church developing new entry points for young generations and those disenfranchised with “church as usual”?

**CHAPTER 5:
THE THEOLOGICAL VIEWS OF THE UNCHURCHED**

One of Americans’ favorite approaches to theology is to cut and paste religious perspectives from different faith traditions. Known as syncretism, people blend different views together to create their own faith views. On many counts, people continue to embrace some of the core teachings of Christianity, while grafting new ideas and perspectives to that.

The theological views held by Kentucky’s unchurched are no exception to this pattern, mixing and matching to create a do-it-yourself belief system. Still, many retain some elements of Christian orthodoxy:

- 84% believe that all people will be judged by God after they die, regardless of their religious beliefs;
- 70% say that God is the all-powerful, all-knowing, perfect creator of the universe who rules the world today;
- and 42% contend that people who do not consciously accept Jesus Christ as their savior will be condemned to hell.

However, other beliefs demonstrate the flair for embracing unorthodox perspectives:

- 66% believe that the devil, or Satan, is not a living being but is a symbol of evil;
- 51% assert that all religious faiths teach the same basic principles;
- 49% say a person can lead a full and satisfying life even if they do not pursue spiritual development or maturity;
- and 20% describe God as “a state of higher consciousness,” as “the realization of human potential,” or that “everyone is God.”

Interestingly, most unchurched adults – 59% – have personal confidence that they will personally go to Heaven when they die (59%). People want to believe the best (there is a God, they will personally go to Heaven) without embracing the worst (Satan does not exist).

Table 5.1 – The Religious Beliefs of the Unchurched

% of unchurched in Kentucky and U.S. who agree with each statement

	KY	U.S.
• all people will be judged by God after they die, regardless of their religious beliefs	84%	77%
• the devil, or Satan, is not a living being but is a symbol of evil	66	64
• you will personally go to Heaven when you die	59	64
• all religious faiths teach the same basic principles	51	49
• a person can lead a full and satisfying life even if they do not pursue spiritual development or maturity	49	59
• people who do not consciously accept Jesus Christ as their savior will be condemned to hell.....	42	24

In comparison with the national average, Kentucky’s unchurched adults are different in several ways. They are more likely to believe in eternal judgment (84% to 77%) and the necessity of salvation through Christ (42% to 24%). People in Kentucky were also less likely to embrace the idea that a person can lead a full and satisfying life without spirituality (49% to 59%) as well as more likely to possess an orthodox view of God (70% to 51%). It shows, then, that in some areas of religious beliefs, Kentuckians retain a deeper connection to their Christian roots than is true among the nation’s unchurched.

However, when it came to other beliefs – that Satan is not real, that they will personally go to Heaven, and that all religious faiths teach the same thing – Kentucky’s unchurched were not significantly different than the national norms.

Table 5.2 – Beliefs About God

% of unchurched

	KY	U.S.
• God is the all-powerful, all-knowing, perfect creator of the universe who rules the world today.....	70%	51%
• God represents a state of higher consciousness that a person may reach.	8	15
• God refers to the total realization of personal, human potential.....	6	9
• Everyone is god.....	6	4
• there is no such thing as God.....	4	8
• there are many gods, each with different power and authority.....	1	7
• not sure	5	6
•		

Beliefs About the Bible

The research tweaked one final myth about the unchurched: their levels of Bible ownership. In all, nearly 9 in every 10 unchurched Kentuckians (90%) say they own a Bible. Those least likely to own a Bible were Mosaics, Busters, men, college grads, singles, and those uncommitted to Christ. Still, a majority of each of these groups owns a Bible. Although we know that 36% of the unchurched read the Bible in a typical month, what we do not know based upon the research is what percent of these people are using contemporary language translations or what degree they are able to understand the Scripture they read. (If you recall, Bible reading was addressed in Chapter 1.)

When we asked respondents to describe their views about the Bible, a plurality of unchurched Kentuckians (38%) expressed that the Bible is the actual word of God and should be taken literally, word for word. This perspective was embraced by just 10% of the unchurched nationally.

Among the unchurched nationwide, the more common perspectives were that the Bible is the inspired word of God and has no errors, although some verses are meant to be symbolic rather than literal (29%) and that the Bible is the inspired word of God but has some factual or historical errors (21%). Among Kentuckians, 20% embraced the “some verses are symbolic” perspective, while 13% said the Bible has errors.

Kentucky’s unchurched were also less likely than the norm (9% to 15%) to believe that the Bible is not inspired by God but tells how the writers of the Bible understood the ways and

principles of God. Similarly, Kentuckians were slightly less likely (13% to 18%) to embrace the view that the Bible is just another book of teachings written by men than contains stories and advice.

Kentuckians’ perspectives about the Bible represent good news and bad. The good news is that Kentucky’s Christian leaders will have a more solid footing on which to work than is true among other states. A greater percentage of the population esteems the Bible – and has an orthodox view of Scripture – than is true elsewhere in the U.S.

The bad news has two sides to it. For one thing, there is a greater sense of “been there, done that” among the unchurched in Kentucky – a sense that they already know the end of the story. So breaking through and presenting the Gospel in a fresh manner is critical, and difficult. The other side to this is that literally hundreds of thousands of unchurched people have little or no respect for the Bible – other than “tolerance” for the fact that other people revere it. Among these individuals, the task of presenting biblical teaching and arguments will fall on jaded ears.

Table 5.3 – Bible Ownership, Perspectives About the Bible

	KY	U.S.
Bible ownership		
• own a Bible	90%	86%
perspectives about the Bible		
• the Bible is the actual word of God and should be taken literally, word for word	39%	10%
• the Bible is the inspired word of God and has no errors, although some verses are meant to be symbolic rather than literal.....	20	29
• the Bible is the inspired word of God but has some factual or historical errors	13	21
• the Bible was not inspired by God but tells how the writers of the Bible understood the ways and principles of God.....	9	15
• the Bible is just another book of teachings written by men that contains stories and advice	13	18
• other	1	1
• not sure	6	5

Questions for Reflection

- Suppose an unchurched person were to visit your church next weekend. Does your have a non-threatening process that identifies his or her beliefs? Do you try to determine what types of spiritual commitments they have made and need to make? Is the process fluid enough so that you minister to that person based upon what they currently believe or is the ministry “one size fits all”?
- What have you learned about communicating and ministering to those who embrace syncretism – that is, the blending of faith views into a personal theological perspective? What works and doesn’t work in your context?

- How do you identify areas where you congregants have theological soft spots, since syncretism occurs among churchgoers just as commonly as among the unchurched? (And, syncretism undermines the evangelism efforts of the congregation among the unchurched by obscuring the real Gospel message.)

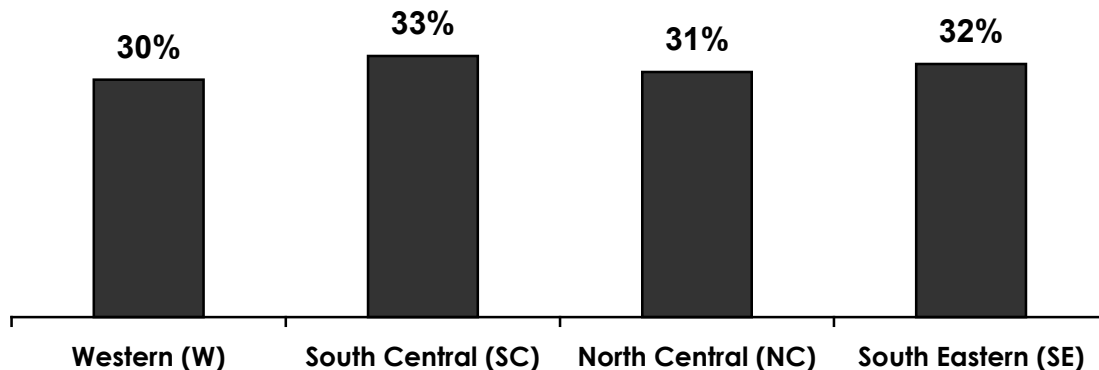
- What types of unchurched people does your church typically attract: those with hostile or indifferent attitudes about the Bible or those who already esteem the Bible? What have you learned about communicating with each type of person?

CHAPTER 6: REGIONAL PATTERNS

This chapter explores regional differences between the four major ministry areas in Kentucky, as designated by the Kentucky Baptist Convention. Those areas include the Western region (W), the South Central region (SC), the North Central region (NC), and the South Eastern region (SE).

One of the first things to point out about the four regions is that each has virtually the same proportion of unchurched people. In each area, slightly more than 1 in every 3 residents were unchurched, including the West (30%), South Central (33%), North Central (31%), and South Eastern (32%).

Regardless of Region, About 3 in Every 10 Residents is Unchurched



Before diving into the description of each region's unique characteristics, keep one caveat in mind. Even though many of the regional differences qualify as statistically significant, in practical terms, the difference may be very slight. For instance, those in the W and the SE regions were more likely than average to have read the Bible in the past month (52% and 54%, respectively), while those in the SC and NC regions (42% and 43%, respectively) were significantly less likely to do so. While the difference *is* statistically significant – and may, in fact, have some influence on your ministry efforts – in practical terms the gap is not large. Consider that in the W and the SE, 5 in every 10 read the Bible, which compares to 4 in every 10 within the SC and NC regions.

So remember that while each region certainly has its own identity, do not lose sight of the big picture taking shape in the state of Kentucky – nor should you ignore the equally unique characteristics of your local community and context.

As you peruse Tables 6.1 – 6.4, you will notice arrows such as these: ↑ and ↓. The arrows designate statistically significant differences compared to the state average. An up-facing arrow means the given characteristic is more likely to describe that region. The opposite is true for down-facing arrows.

Table 6.1 – Regional Differences: The Profile of the Unchurched

	W	SC	NC	SE
religious conviction				
- self-described Christian.....	89	86	85	85
- ever made personal commitment to Christ.....	79↑	71	70	74
church background				
- previously churched.....	87↑	80	85	82
- Baptist.....	51↑	38↓	35↓	53↑
- Catholic.....	10	24↑	13	3↓
- Christian.....	6	8	17↑	5
- Church of God.....	1	2	5	9↑
- Methodist.....	8	6	8	5
- non-denominational/independent.....	7↑	2	2	2
- Pentecostal/Foursquare.....	3	4	6	9↑
spiritual activities (typical month)				
- prayed to God.....	88	83	84	88
- read the Bible, other than at church.....	52↑	42↓	43↓	51↑
- visited a website for a worship experience.....	8	9	8	8
- attended a house church.....	6	6	8	11
psychographics				
- satisfied with your life these days.....	75	75	73	66↓
- spiritual.....	71↑	62	57↓	65
- stressed out.....	47	40↓	53	52
- read a book from start to finish.....	45	53↑	50	43↓
demographics				
- mean age.....	48	46	46	47
- college graduate.....	15↓	26↑	26↑	10↓
- \$50K+.....	25	35↑	37↑	17↓
- currently married.....	57	52	59	59
- parent of a child <18.....	41	35	41	40
- politically conservative.....	27	27	26	24
- politically moderate.....	49	47	51	56↑

The Western Region

One of the first things you notice about unchurched adults living in the western part of Kentucky is their comparatively high levels of Christian commitment. They are more likely than the norm to have already made a personal commitment to Christ (79% of them have) and nearly 9 in every 10 have been churched at one time of their life (87%).

And while they do not currently attend church, many of them retain vestiges of their previous church experiences: 88% pray in a typical month (which is average, compared to other regions), 52% read the Bible (which is above average), and 71% say they are spiritual (also above average).

Most Westerners used to attend a Baptist church (51%). Other denominations formerly attended included Catholic (10%), Methodist (8%), non-denominational (7%), Christian (6%), and Pentecostal/Foursquare (3%). Note that Western residents were comprised of an above-average percentage of ex-Baptists and those leaving non-denominational churches.

Interestingly, when we asked Western residents to describe the type of church they would like to attend, nearly half (45%) said they would prefer a church that focuses on leading people to accept Christ. On the other hand, they were comparatively disinterested in a church that focuses on serving the needy (12%).

Theologically, more than 7 in 10 believed they would be going to Heaven when they die (71%), making it the region feeling most assured of their eternal salvation. Although 44% agreed that all religious faiths teach the same lessons, fewer unchurched Westerners embraced this concept than was true of other regions.

Table 6.2 – Regional Differences: Perspectives About Churches

	W	SC	NC	SE
views of churches				
- definitely/probably willing to seek help from church.....	46%	37%↓	49%	51%
- have very favorable impression of Christianity.....	54	45↓	47	53
- have very favorable impression of churches.....	34	24↓	30	34
- a place where you can connect to God.....	84	76↓	84	87
views of Southern Baptist churches				
- have specific concerns about SB churches.....	20	29↑	21	14↓
terms preferred by the unchurched				
- inquirer.....	60	56	65↑	49↓
- seeker.....	61	53↓	55	61
- explorer.....	54	57	57	51
- lost.....	17	15	21	33↑
- prodigal.....	22	16	21	19
- non-Christian.....	14	16	18	23↑
- non-believer.....	6	8	12	7

Table 6.3 – Regional Differences: Preferred Churches

	W	SC	NC	SE
entry points				
- worship services.....	53%	49%	43%	52%
- special event	16	18	20	16
- small class taught by the pastor.....	6	7	7	5
- Sunday school	5	6	6	5
- small group Bible study in a home	4	4	4	4
- community outreach	3	6	8	8
preferred church				
- one that focuses on teaching people the Bible	24	23	29	30
- one that focuses on serving the needy	12↓	22↑	21↑	9↓
- one that emphasizes friendships among attenders	10	13	8	5↓
- one that focuses on leading people to accept Christ	45↑	30↓	36↓	47↑
% who strongly prefer each option				
→ OPTION A: traditional hymns.....	41	36↓	41	45
OPTION B: contemporary worship music	18	19	18	14
→ OPTION A: formal worship service.....	23	24	26	25
OPTION B: informal worship service	40	33	39	38
→ OPTION A: less than 100 people attending.....	50	47	52	55
OPTION B: more than 300 people attending.....	12	10	10	9
→ OPTION A: service where everyone participates	51	49	45	53
OPTION B: service with little participation	16	18	20	14
→ OPTION A: service where children attend	50	47	49	51
OPTION B: service just for adults	22	17	21	19
→ OPTION A: with a choir that is accompanied by an organ.....	35	38	37	28↓
OPTION B: with a singer accompanied by a band	22	21	23	25
→ OPTION A: people raise hands, applaud	35	37	40	38
OPTION B: where people are reserved during the service	32	30	27	27
→ OPTION A: sermons address issues people face in their lives	41	43	45	28↓
OPTION B: sermons based on specific book of the Bible	21	17	21	33↑

South Central

One of the distinctives of the unchurched in the SC region is the fact that 1 in every 4 are ex-Catholics (24%). Still, 38% were formerly Baptist attenders. In contrast with the West, residents of this region were less likely than average to read the Bible in a typical month (though 4 in 10 still did so).

Unchurched residents of SC expressed consistently negative views of churches. Compared to the respondents in other regions, those in SC were least interested in seeking help or advice from churches; least likely to have a favorable impression of Christianity; and least likely to say that churches provide a place where they can connect with God. Nearly 3 in 10

(29%) said they had specific concerns about Southern Baptist churches, registering the region as the least favorable toward Southern Baptists.

If they were to attend a church, these residents were more likely than other regions to desire a church that serves needy people (20%). They expressed below-average interest in a church focused on leading others to Christ (30% -- but notice that this option was actually more likely to be selected within the region than a church that serves the needy). SC unchurched adults also showed reluctance about attending a church featuring hymns. Additionally, they were not especially fond of the term seeker, although a majority (53%) said this phrase described them.

The unchurched of South Central Kentucky were slightly less likely than average to own a Bible, though the vast majority of these adults (86%) owned a copy of the Good Book. This emerged as the region least likely to embrace a literalist view of Scripture (30%), while the most likely to claim the Bible is just another book of teachings by men (13%).

Perhaps due to their lack of esteem for Scripture, residents of the SC were some of the least likely to embrace orthodox Christian beliefs. For instance, 2 in every 3 (67%) agreed with the notion that Satan is merely a symbol of evil. This region was also the most likely to believe that all religions teach the same lessons while most readily rejecting the concept that people who do not consciously accept Christ as savior will be condemned to Hell.

North Central

Residents of this region were most akin to those of South Central, but they also had their unique qualities. They were the least likely to be ex-Baptist attenders (35%), but also came in large proportions from Christian churches (17%). Another 12% of these people were formerly Catholic churchgoers. This was the region where people were least likely to describe themselves as “spiritual.”

Like residents of the SC, these residents were less likely than average to read the Bible each month (though many said they do, 43%) and they tended to be better educated and more financially well-off. Also like the SC, residents of the NC were comparatively less interested in a church focused on helping people accept Christ and more interested in a church that teaches people what the Bible means (29%) and one that focuses on serving the needy (21%).

NC's unchurched showed below-average interest in attending a worship service, though this still qualifies as the most commonly identified entry point for this region (43%). Also, these residents tended to prefer the label “inquirer” compared to residents of other regions.

As for theological beliefs, NC residents were also more likely than average to embrace the Satan-is-symbolic perspective (68%) as well as idea that a person can lead a satisfying life without spiritual development or maturity (53%). The unchurched in this region were also less likely than were other regions to believe that people must accept Jesus Christ to be saved from Hell (41%).

South Eastern

The unchurched people residing in this final region, the South Eastern, are most similar to the Western area in their profile and preferences. Perhaps this relates to the shared Baptist background – like the West, half of SE’s unchurched were formerly Baptist attenders (53%).

On the other hand, this region is unique in that only 3% were from Catholic backgrounds and 9% were from Church of God churches and another 9% were from Pentecostal or Foursquare congregations. This region, then, seems to have a disproportionately high number of “ex-charismatics” – that is, those formerly attending a charismatic or Pentecostal church.

Residents of the SE region also showed above-average Bible reading levels (51%). However, they were less likely than were other regions to say they were satisfied with their life these days (66%). Demographically, this group demonstrated some the lowest education and income levels of all four regions.

As for the type of church they want to attend, a plurality said they would prefer a church that focuses on evangelizing others for Christ (47%). These residents were less interested than any of the other regions in churches that serve the needy (9%) or in churches that emphasize friendships among attenders (5%). These SE residents were the least concerned of any region about a church being Southern Baptist (14%).

The theological perspectives of the SE unchurched were intriguing: on seven different theological questions, these residents held the most biblically centered perspective of any of the four regions. They were the most likely to say that all people will be judged by God after they die; the most likely to hold an orthodox view of God; the least likely to believe that Satan is merely a symbol of evil; the least likely to accept that people can live a satisfying life without spirituality; the most likely to say that people must consciously accept Christ; and the most likely to say that the Bible should be taken literally.

But here is the interesting gap: the unchurched people in SE were the least likely to feel they will personally go to Heaven (55% compared to an average of 66% for the other three regions).

Table 6.4 – Regional Differences: Theological Beliefs				
	<u>W</u>	<u>SC</u>	<u>NC</u>	<u>SE</u>
• all people will be judged by God after they die, regardless of their religious beliefs.....	85%	84%	86%	93%↑
• God is the all-powerful, all-knowing perfect Creator of the world who rules the world today	73	71	70	85↑
• you will personally go to Heaven when you die	71↑	65	61	55↓
• the devil, or Satan, is not a living being but is symbol of evil.....	60	67↑	68↑	55↓
• all religious faiths teach the same basic principles.....	44↓	58↑	51	43↓
• a person can lead a full and satisfying life even if they do not pursue spiritual development or maturity.....	43	49	53↑	34↓
• people who do not pursue consciously accept Jesus Christ as their savior will be condemned to hell.....	50	39↓	41↓	59↑
perspectives about the Bible				
- own a Bible.....	93	86↓	90	95
- Bible is actual word of God, should be taken literally	40	30↓	39	50↑

- Bible is the inspired word of God, some is symbolic	27	.....	23	.....	26	.....	25
- Bible is the inspired word of God, but has some errors	14	.....	15	.....	10	.....	12
- Bible was not inspired; tells how writers understood God.....	5	.....	11	.....	8	.....	6↓
- Bible is just another book of teachings written by men	8	.....	13↑	.....	11	.....	4↓

The survey showed no significant regional differences when it came the following topics: views of churchgoers, reasons for not attending churches, participation in community activities, their self-assessment as a “moral” person, their moral decision-making process, the personal needs they face, and their engagement in prayer.

Questions for Reflection

- How well does the regional profile square with your experiences? (Remember, your experiences do not make the data any more or less accurate. Neither does the data nullify your unique ministry setting.) What assumptions of yours were challenged?
- Given the regional profile, what are the implications for your ministry? What are the unique opportunities and challenges that you see in each region? In *your* region?
- How can you partner with other churches in your area to reach the unchurched in your region in a more sophisticated manner?

CHAPTER 7:
WHAT IT MEANS FOR YOUR MINISTRY

As you've read this report, you have no doubt created a list (mental or paper-and-pencil) of the takeaways for you and your church. Here are some additional insights to weave into your thinking.

1. **Effective ministry to the unchurched starts with a clear and compelling vision.** If you are a pastor or a leader in a local church, it is incumbent upon you to discern God's vision for the congregation you lead. Without vision, as Scripture teaches, people languish. Our research suggests that the vast majority of churches do not have clear vision. Does yours? Even though Christ's Church is called to go into "all the world" (Matthew 28:20), no single congregation can fulfill that commission alone. An individual church has limited resources; its pastor holds a finite amount of energy and influence; and its attenders have only so much time and resources as well. These resources must be spent in a focused and vision-driven fashion. *Is your church's vision the sparkplug for its efforts to reach the unchurched?*
2. **Re-evaluate the effectiveness of the discipleship process to sharpen your church's evangelism effectiveness.** The reason most Kentuckians are unchurched is not a failure of evangelism; it is a failure of discipleship. Keep three numbers in mind: 81% used to be churched; 82% are self-identified Christians; and 67% have already made "a personal commitment to Christ that is still important in their life." The bottomline is that most unchurched people have given churches a fair shake. But churches have failed to provide these people with accountable, dynamic environments that nurture their devotion to Christ. If your church's discipleship efforts are sub-par, your efforts to reach the unchurched – no matter how well conceived or executed – will simply "recycle" lukewarm Christians. *What steps does your church need to make to enhance its discipleship efforts?*
3. **Define success when it comes to reaching the unchurched.** Many church leaders equate reaching the unchurched with evangelism, that is helping people make commitments to Christ. But truly reaching the unchurched is more complex than that, because the unchurched is a complex audience. So how should churches and Christians define success? Perhaps Henry and Richard Blackaby's description of spiritual leadership is appropriate in helping define success among Kentucky's unchurched: *helping to move people onto God's agenda.* Our goals for the unchurched people who visit our churches should be defined, not by our own agenda or that of our church, but by the unique purposes God has for that individual. *How does your church define success in reaching the unchurched? Worship attendance? First-time visitors? Or transformed lives?*
4. **Embrace a variety of approaches to evangelism.** The research underscores that unchurched people are incredibly diverse, and will not respond to one-size-fits-all evangelism. Although you do not have to be an expert in all the newest ministry

fads, there are a variety of approaches to engaging the unchurched that should be considered. Here are a handful of important endeavors you may want to evaluate for your context.

- a. Prayer evangelism – This involves two types of activities. First, praying for non-Christians and asking that the Holy Spirit will open their hearts and minds to accepting Christ. Second, helping the unchurched to pray in a more spiritually significant way. When you think about it, prayer represents one of the most common spiritual activities of the unchurched. Everyday, tens of thousands of unchurched Kentuckians are praying. These may not be perfect prayers (whose are?), but they seem to be the type of spiritual meditations churches dream of facilitating: earnest communication between God and His people. *What creative things could churches do that might help people intimately experience the living God through their prayers?*
- b. Service evangelism – Another approach to evangelism is to provide service opportunities for unchurched people to join forces with the local church to help people in their community. Many of the unchurched say they would be interested in this type of church (though their follow-through in actually participating will probably be hit or miss). These types of projects facilitate relationships between churchgoers and the unchurched; they help the unchurched feel less defensive; they position the church favorably in the community; and they generate a secondary audience for evangelism – those being helped by the service. *Is your church equipped to embrace service evangelism?*
- c. Socratic evangelism – This is the process of leading people to spiritual insight, not through formal teaching methods, but through a guided process of questions and answers. This is an important approach to evangelism because it takes the burden of spiritual growth and transfers it (mostly) to the student rather than teacher. Mosaics and Busters – that is, people under age 40 – are particularly receptive to Socratic evangelism. The challenge? It is hard to be a good Socratic mentor. *Can your church develop a process to train such mentors?*
- d. Child evangelism – If you have not yet moved children’s ministry to or near the top of your church’s priorities, consider this: what a person believes theologically by age 13 is, in the vast majority of cases, what they will die believing. Children matter immensely in the scheme of evangelism effectiveness. It is singularly the most important period of theological growth for most humans, but it is also an age that is overlooked by churches. (And having children also helps many of the unchurched to reconsider their spiritual priorities as well.) *Is your church prioritizing children’s ministry as it should?*
- e. Teen discipleship – Youth ministry typically focuses on teen evangelism, but here again, most Kentucky teens have already made some type of commitment to Christ. But after age 18, the church falls off the map for most teens. Nearly 3 in every 5 churched teens will drop out of church by the time they reach age 29. Thus, the gaping hole in teen ministry is discipleship – that is, helping teens to develop a biblical worldview that helps

them interpret and respond to the world in a God-honoring manner. *Will your church carefully evaluate its youth ministry and embrace a holistic approach to teen discipleship?*

5. **Explore ways in which your church can partner with those creating new church models.** New (and not so new) expressions of Christian community are popping up throughout the country. Cyberchurches (new). House churches (not so new). Marketplace churches (new). These types of models and many others are creating new forums for people to grow in Christ and interact with other believers. This project showed that appreciable numbers of unchurched Kentuckians are already engaging in house churches and cyberchurches. But most congregations have largely resisted or ignored these new forums. In some ways, the reason why unchurched people are using these new models is because of their disillusionment and dissatisfaction with churches. Whether or not you support the rise of new models, their rise is inexorable and tens of thousands of people are receiving spiritual input and output in these settings. *What will the partnerships, if any, between congregations and new models look like? Who will have the courage to nurture these models and support their leaders?*
6. **Re-evaluate what it means to show “genuine interest” in the unchurched.** Although churchgoers and pastors generally have the very best of intentions, the unchurched often perceive Christians to possess ulterior motives. One of the most disheartening revelations of the Kentucky research is this fact: churchgoers do not anticipate the negative perceptions they generate among the unchurched when it comes to genuineness. What can be done to revive churches’ sagging image in this regard? One helpful element would be greater accountability *within* the Christian community. Having church leaders who had meaningful relationships with the unchurched would also help. Showing genuineness toward the unchurched is not about pandering to the sensitivities of the unchurched. It is about displaying the heart of Jesus. *Can churches and leaders reorient their activities and attitudes to demonstrate authentic interest in others?*
7. **Work to manage the expectations of key audiences.** The job of pastoring is growing increasingly complex. One of the new complexities is trying to manage people’s expectations. If you are a pastor, here some of the many expectations you have to keep in mind:
 - a. You must help churchgoers be realistic. First, they must have an honest assessment of their own skills and gifts, for what they can offer to their church (Romans 12:3). Second, they must realize that the ultimate responsibility for other people’s spiritual commitment rests with God, not them. God expects obedience, not results. Third, if your church is going to engage the unchurched, churchgoers must be prepared to embrace these people, warts and all. *Will your congregants realize that getting beyond the walls of the church is never quick, clean, or painless?*
 - b. Your own expectations and those of your staff and leaders must also be managed. For one thing, there are dozens of misconceptions about the unchurched that can derail your church’s leaders from making sound

ministry decisions.¹ Take care to operate on the basis of an objective assessment of the opportunities and challenges facing your church. For another, ministry to adults is difficult. If a person reaches adulthood without ever having made a commitment to Christ, they only have a 6% chance of ever doing so. Managing your own expectations regarding evangelism effectiveness will help you guard yourself and your leaders against discouragement. Finally, be realistic about what your church can and should do in the effort to engage the unchurched. Although there were cultural factors at work, Scripture seems to give the responsibility to evangelize to an entire city, not one leader or one congregation. *How can you partner with other churches in your city to minister with relevance and synergy?*

- c. Finally, as a pastor you have to help manage the expectations of the unchurched who visit your church. You have to convey to them that the Christian life is desirable, without overselling its attributes (e.g., *your life will never be the same; you will experience a complete turnaround*, etc.). The same thing with the Bible – people need to understand its authority and necessity in their lives without it being hyped (e.g. *the Bible is easy to understand*). (See 2 Peter 3:16.) *Can you communicate the virtues of the Christian life and of the Scriptures in a way that is wary of setting people up for disillusionment?*

Your Turn

If you are a pastor, growing your church from the outside in has never been easy. Yet, it is likely to get tougher in the coming decade. There will be unprecedented opportunities as well as deep, unforeseen pitfalls. I hope this report provides a reality check as you prepare for the months ahead.

If you are not a pastor, I hope that this report has given you new insights about unchurched adults in Kentucky. Work hard to develop deep friendships with unchurched so that you can even better understand their perspectives and needs. Take careful stock of your spiritual gifts and listen carefully to how God is asking you to serve His Church in the next few years. Your role is vital.

In the end, we do our best to serve God and He blesses or withholds His blessing from our efforts. It is never our brilliance in teaching, marketing, communication, strategy, execution or timing that results in success. It is our commitment to knowing, loving and serving God, with all of our heart, mind, soul and strength, regardless of what human indicators suggest.

Opportunities for ministry abound in Kentucky. May you, with God's grace and strength, make the most of those possibilities.

¹ This report has addressed many of those myths. George Barna's book, [Grow Your Church from the Outside In](#), describes other misconceptions about ministry to the unchurched.

APPENDIX A
ABOUT THE KENTUCKY RESEARCH

The research included 1,204 telephone interviews conducted among a representative, random sample of unchurched (n=696), nominally churched (n=306), and churched adults (n=202) over the age of 18 currently residing in Kentucky. The survey was conducted from October 8, 2004 through October 17, 2004. The sampling error for the sample of unchurched is plus or minus three percentage points, at the 95% confidence level.

The survey calls were made at various times during the day and evening so that every individual selected for inclusion was contacted at least five separate days, at different times of the day, to maximize the possibility of contact. This is a quality control procedure that ensures that individuals in the sampling frame have an equivalent probability of inclusion within the survey, thereby increasing the survey reliability.

The average interview lasted 19 minutes. All of the interviews were conducted by experienced, trained interviewers; interviewers were supervised at all times; and every interviewer was monitored using the Barna Silent Monitoring™ system.

The survey was conducted through the use of the CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing) system in place at the BRG field center. This process ensures that question skip patterns are properly administered by interviewers and that survey data are recorded accurately.

In this study, the cooperation rate among participants was 94%. This is a very high rate (i.e. the industry norm is about 60%) and it significantly raises the confidence we may place in the resulting statistics. In every survey there are a variety of ways in which the accuracy of the data may be affected. The cooperation rate is one such potential cause of error in measurement: the lower the coop rate, the less representative the respondents interviewed may be of the population from which they were drawn, thereby reducing the accuracy of the results. Other sources of error include question-design bias, question-order bias, interviewer mistakes, sampling error and respondent deception. Many of these types of errors cannot be accurately estimated. However, having a high cooperation rate does enhance the reliability of the information procured.

APPENDIX B
ABOUT THE BARNAL GROUP, LTD.

The Barna Group, Ltd. began operations in 1984 as a marketing research firm serving Christian ministries, non-profit organizations and various media and financial corporations. During its two decades of service, TBG has carefully and strategically tracked the role of faith in America, developing the nation's most comprehensive database on spiritual indicators. The objective of that information is to help Christian ministries think and act more biblically and strategically.

In 2004, the company was restructured to facilitate its vision: to provide leadership and unique, strategic information and resources that help facilitate spiritual transformation in America. The Group accomplishes this calling through the activities of its five divisions.

The Barna Research Group provides primary research services to organizations focused on enhancing people's spiritual lives. It conducts qualitative and quantitative research on a commissioned basis, as well as developing self-initiated studies of the spiritual landscape of the nation. It has worked with thousands of ministries across the country and is widely relied upon by media, churches and educational institutions for insight into matters of faith and contemporary society.

BarnaFilms produces visual and audio media for ministry use, as well as partnering with organizations creating cutting edge technology that facilitate the use of such media. Whether it is the creation of video loops, dramatic vignettes, long-form films, musical compilations or computer software applications, BarnaFilms is focused on providing effective communication tools for the emerging Church.

BarnaBooks provides written communications – primarily books – for individuals interested in enhancing their leadership, cultural understanding, or family experiences. Working with a pool of leaders and communicators who are helping the Church to grow and become more effective in reaching people with God's truth, these books are designed to inform, challenge and guide people to more authentic faith experiences and expression.

The Josiah Corps is a process developed to identify young people between the ages of 8 and 12 whom God has called to lead the Church in the future, and to provide them with developmental resources and experiences over a decade-long period.

Transformational Church Network (TCN) is a means of resourcing, connecting and partnering with healthy churches in the strategic development of the coming Church.

The Barna Group accomplishes these outcomes by providing vision, information, evaluation and resources through the production of specific resources and through a network of intimate partnerships. Among its strategic partners are EMI Christian Music Group, Media Complete, Filmdisc, and Zoetics.

APPENDIX C
MORE HELP FROM THE BARNA GROUP

Do you like to impact lives for Christ?

If you do, then start a FREE subscription to *The Barna Update* today.

Twice each month, Christian researcher George Barna produces a free report for ministry leaders that describes his latest findings and their ministry implications. This widely acclaimed resource, *The Barna Update*, is available on-line to subscribers for no cost.

The Barna Update can help you be more effective in ministry by “understanding the times” and helping you “know what to do” (1 Chr. 12:32). Recent issues have explored:

- Worldview development among children
- Teenagers’ reactions to their church experience
- Parents and their views on the spiritual growth of children
- The divorce rate among Christians
- The state of the local church
- Prevailing spiritual beliefs, by generation
- ... and much more ...

Roughly every two weeks, Barna will send you a brief e-mail describing the new research with a link to that free report. To get on-board, go to www.barna.org and enter your e-mail address in the *Barna Update* subscription box in the left-column of the home page. If you do not like the reports, you can easily and immediately “unsubscribe” at any time.

To gain insights into people’s attitudes, beliefs, needs and behavior, sign up for *The Barna Update*. It’s not just a bunch of statistics; it’s ***information that leads to transformation.***

Interested in more information about reaching the unchurched?

You might also enjoy these resources from the Barna Group. All resources are available at sale prices online, at www.barna.org.

- Grow Your Church from the Outside In, by George Barna (hardcover)
- Re-Churching the Unchurched, featuring George Barna (audio or video)
- Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions, by George Barna (hardcover)
- Growing True Disciples, by George Barna (hardcover)

APPENDIX C
ABOUT THE RESEARCHER

David Kinnaman, the lead researcher on the Kentucky project, is the Vice President and Strategic Leader of the Barna Research Group. Since joining Barna Research in 1995, David has designed and analyzed a wide range of projects for a variety of clients, including the American Bible Society, the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, Campus Crusade for Christ, Christian Booksellers Association, Columbia House, Compassion International, Easter Seals, Focus on the Family, Integrity Media, InterVarsity, Salvation Army, Thomas Nelson, Time-Life, Prison Fellowship Ministries, World Vision, Zondervan and many others.

As a spokesperson for the firm's research, he is frequently quoted in major media outlets (such as *USA Today*, ABC News, Fox News, *Washington Post*, *Chicago Tribune*, *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Dallas Morning News*, and *The Wall Street Journal*). He is also in demand as a speaker about ministry trends, today's teenagers, the profile of young leaders, and generational changes.

The son of a megachurch pastor, David has served in various capacities within congregations he has attended, including working with teenagers, teaching, and providing strategic consulting. He graduated summa cum laude with a degree in psychology and statistics from Biola University (La Mirada, California), where he served as Student Chaplain.

He currently serves on the boards of two organizations: Relevate, a non-profit ministry; and Adchek, an advertising company.

David and his wife, Jill, live in Ventura, California, with their three kids: Emily (age 5), Annika (age 3), and Zack (born on July 22). He and his family enjoy going to Disneyland, reading, playing at the park, and singing together. David likes to watch sports, play basketball, write, and woodwork.

APPENDIX E
ESTIMATING THE ACCURACY OF SURVEY RESEARCH

Do you remember reading the results of a survey and noticing the fine print that says that the results are accurate within plus or minus three percentage points (or some similar number)? That figure refers to the "range of sampling error." The range of sampling error indicates the accuracy of the results and is dependent upon two factors: 1) the sample size and 2) the degree to which the result you are examining is close to 50 percent or the extremes, 0 percent and 100 percent.

You can estimate the accuracy of your survey results using the table below. First, find the column heading that is closest to your sample size. Next, find the row whose label is closest to the response percentages observed for a particular question from your survey. The intersection of the row and column displays the number of percentage points that need to be added to, and subtracted from, the observed result to obtain the range of error. There is a 95 percent chance that the true percentage of the group being sampled is in that range.

<u>Result</u>	<u>Sample Size</u>											
	<u>100</u>	<u>200</u>	<u>300</u>	<u>400</u>	<u>500</u>	<u>600</u>	<u>800</u>	<u>1000</u>	<u>1200</u>	<u>1500</u>	<u>2000</u>	<u>2500</u>
05% or 95%	4.4	3.1	2.5	2.2	2.0	1.8	1.5	1.4	1.3	1.1	.96	.87
10% or 90%	6.0	4.3	3.5	3.0	2.7	2.5	2.1	1.0	1.7	1.6	1.3	1.2
15% or 85%	7.1	5.1	4.1	3.6	3.2	2.9	2.5	2.3	2.1	1.9	1.6	1.4
20% or 80%	8.0	5.7	4.6	4.0	3.6	3.3	2.6	2.5	2.3	2.1	1.8	1.6
25% or 75%	8.7	6.1	5.0	4.3	3.9	3.6	3.0	2.8	2.5	2.3	1.9	1.7
30% or 70%	9.2	6.5	5.3	4.6	4.1	3.8	3.2	2.8	2.7	2.4	2.0	1.8
35% or 65%	9.5	6.8	5.5	4.8	4.3	3.9	3.3	3.1	2.8	2.5	2.1	1.9
40% or 60%	9.8	7.0	5.7	4.9	4.4	4.0	3.4	3.1	2.8	2.5	2.2	2.0
45% or 55%	9.9	7.0	5.8	5.0	4.5	4.1	3.5	3.2	2.9	2.6	2.2	2.0
50%	10.0	7.1	5.8	5.0	4.5	4.1	3.5	3.2	2.9	2.6	2.2	2.0

Note that the above statistics only relate to the sampling accuracy of survey results. When comparing the results of two subgroups (e.g., men versus women), a different procedure is followed and usually requires a greater sample size. Further, there is a range of other errors that may influence survey results (e.g. biased question wording, inaccurate data tabulation) -- errors whose influence cannot be statistically estimated.



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