

Frequent Worship Attendance Plummets During College Years

Participating in worship gatherings at least twice a month is uncommon among 18- to 22-year-old Protestants, according to a LifeWay Research report published Jan. 15.

The survey focused on Protestants who had attended church at least twice monthly during their high school years and sought to assess engagement in the local church in the four years after graduation.

Two-thirds of survey respondents said “yes” when asked, “Did you stop attending church regularly (twice a month or more) for at least a year between the ages of 18 and 22?”

While 27 percent of all respondents said they attend church at least once a week, 22 percent do not attend church currently and 25 percent attend only a few times a year.

By comparison, two-thirds or more of respondents said they attended church gatherings regularly from ages 13 to 17.

Around 18 to 19 years of age, the frequency of worship attendance dropped significantly, falling from 58 percent saying they regularly attended church at age 18 to 40 percent at 19.

The trend continued, with only 36 percent attending regularly by age 20, and 33 percent by ages 21 and 22.

The downward trend in worship attendance stabilized by age 23, fluctuating slightly between 33 percent and 35 percent saying they regularly went to church from ages 23 to 30.

When asked to explain the reason for the decline in regular attendance, 96 percent of respondents pointed to “life changes/situations” as one factor.

Other leading reasons were “church/pastor-related reasons” (73 percent), “religious, ethical or political beliefs” (70 percent) and “student/youth ministry reasons” (60 percent).

“For the most part, people aren’t leaving the church out of bitterness, the influence of college atheists or a renunciation of their faith,” observed Ben Trueblood, director of student ministry at LifeWay, in a [press release](#) announcing the report.

“What the research tells us may be even more concerning for Protestant churches: There was nothing about the church experience or faith foundation of those teenagers that caused them to seek out a connection to a local church once they entered a new phase of life. The time they spent with activity in church was simply replaced by something else.”

The sampling error for the survey is plus-or-minus 2.4 percent.

The full report is available [here](#).