

What could bring seekers to church? survey asks

by [Cathy Lynn Grossman](#) in the [August 3, 2016](#) issue

The “seekers” have left the church—if they ever came.

LifeWay Research has looked at what might draw them in, zeroing in on people who say they have not attended a religious service in the past six months except for special events or holidays.

Worship? Not particularly interested, two in three people told researchers from the evangelical firm, which is based in Nashville, Tennessee.

Talk about God? Not so much, said three in four of the 2,000 people in the survey—including 57 percent who identified as Christians.

“Are a lot of Americans on a conscious journey to learn who Jesus Christ is?” said Scott McConnell, executive director of LifeWay. “I don’t think so.”

Even that old seeker standby—the search for meaning—doesn’t cut it for many. Although 57 percent of those surveyed said finding “their deeper purpose” is “a major priority,” 31 percent disagreed at least somewhat and 12 percent were unsure.

Yet 70 percent of people who do not attend religious services agreed that “there is an ultimate purpose and plan for every person’s life.”

But whose plan is the unanswered question. LifeWay deliberately didn’t mention God in asking about “plan” and “purpose,” McConnell said, because it wanted to assess whether people had “a framework of wanting to make better, or the best, choices for life.”

However, offering a venue to “express compassion” can be a top draw for churches, according to Rick Richardson, professor of evangelism and leadership at Wheaton College. He is a research fellow for the Billy Graham Center for Evangelism, which sponsored the survey.

Nearly 62 percent would come for a meeting at church on neighborhood safety. Other ways people could be inspired to visit were for events such as concerts (51 percent), sports or exercise programs (46 percent), or a neighborhood get-together (45 percent).

Only 11 percent said they'd change the subject if religion came up in conversation. Most (51 percent) said a personal invitation from a friend or family member could draw them to church.

But only one in five would accept if that invitation came from a church member knocking at their door, a TV commercial, a postcard, or a Facebook ad.

Bringing people into church is "a different kind of conversation," McConnell said. "We need to say take it one day at a time: 'Let's introduce you to Jesus and see what you think.'"

The survey was conducted May 23–June 1. The margin of error is plus or minus 2.7 percentage points. —Religion News Service

*This article was edited on July 25, 2016.*