

YOU LOST ME: New Book from Researcher David Kinnaman Looks at Why Millions of Young Christians Are Dropping Out of Church

Almost 60 percent of young people ages 15-29 who grow up Christian stop attending church. They are disconnecting from a church they perceive to be overprotective, shallow, repressive, exclusive, and anti-science, according to new findings from the Barna Group research firm. David Kinnaman, coauthor of *unChristian* and president of the Barna Group, explores the dropout phenomenon in his new book, *You Lost Me* (Baker Books, \$17.99, October 1, 2011). Armed with new research and the poignant personal stories of young Protestant and Catholic Christians, Kinnaman reveals why they are leaving in droves—and what their defection means for the church.

You Lost Me draws from eight new scientific national studies, including 5,000 interviews with young adults, youthworkers, pastors, and parents. The young people interviewed told irreverent, blunt, and often painful stories of why they left the church. “The book’s title reflects their disdain for one-sided communication and a formulaic faith disconnected from the real world,” Kinnaman says.

While teens are some of the most religiously active Americans, they are MIA from the pews during their 20s—the least religiously active age group in America. While they have generally favorable views of Jesus, they also harbor significant doubts, and they do not find church a hospitable place to express them.

Kinnaman identifies three types of dropouts:

- **Nomads** walk away from church engagement, but still consider themselves Christian.
- **Prodigals** lose their faith, describing themselves as no longer Christian.
- **Exiles** are still invested in their Christian faith but feel caught between culture and church.

These nomads, prodigals, and exiles are leaving because they find the church to be:

- **Overprotective:** demonizing anything outside of church, and squashing creativity;
- **Shallow:** offering platitudes instead of a compelling call to follow Jesus;
- **Anti-science:** faith and science seem incompatible, yet young people see the helpful role science plays in medicine, technology, care of the natural world and other areas;
- **Repressive:** religious rules and sexual mores feel stifling to their individualist mindset;
- **Exclusive:** to those shaped by a culture that esteems open-mindedness, tolerance, and acceptance, Christianity’s claims to exclusivity are a hard sell.

Kinnaman argues that while dropping out is a natural part of the maturation process in any generation, his findings point to a unique, pressing reality for the church. “Many of the struggles experienced by today’s young dropouts are not new, yet they are exacerbated by new realities of access, alienation and authority, which combine to make today’s twentysomethings discontinuously different from previous generations.”

-continued-

The next generation is living in a new technological, social, and spiritual reality with nearly unlimited access to other people and information. Alienated from traditional institutions, they are skeptical of authority and don't know who to trust. The Barna Group's studies show major drops in awareness and positive perceptions of evangelical influencers such as Billy Graham and James Dobson. In fact, Billy Graham is less favorably viewed than Paris Hilton among younger Americans, and the nation's most prominent pastors, Rick Warren and Bill Hybels are virtually unknown to them.

Based on what he's learned from young people about why they leave the church, Kinnaman says the church needs to reconsider how it makes disciples; rediscover Christian calling and vocation; and value wisdom over information. "After countless conversations, I'm convinced that historic practices and wisdom-laden ways of believing are what the next generation really needs," he says.

Kinnaman finds reason for optimism and opportunities for new growth in the church. "From this generation, so intent on reimagining faith and practice, I believe the established church can learn new patterns of faithfulness," he says.

The book concludes with "50 Ideas to Find a Generation" from Christian thinkers, theologians and scholars, including Francis Chan, John Ortberg, Kara Powell, Kenda Creasy Dean, Richard Stearns, Scot McKnight, Shane Claiborne, Donna Freitas, and Gabe Lyons.

David Kinnaman is President and majority owner of Barna Group, a research company located in Ventura, California. He has designed and analyzed hundreds of market research projects for a variety of clients, including American Bible Society, CARE, Columbia House, Easter Seals, Focus on the Family, Habitat for Humanity, the Humane Society, NBC-Universal, The ONE Campaign, the Salvation Army, SONY, Walden Media, World Vision, and many others.

He has overseen 86 nationwide, representative research studies among American adults, teenagers, tweens, and clergy on matters of faith, spirituality, public opinion, political attitudes, and cultural dynamics. This body of public opinion research is frequently quoted in major media outlets such as USA Today, the Wall Street Journal, Fox News, the Chicago Tribune, the New York Times, and the Los Angeles Times. During Kinnaman's 16 years at the firm, he has supervised or directed interviews with more than 350,000 individuals and leaders.

Kinnaman is coauthor of the best-selling book *unChristian*. He speaks often on trends, teenagers, vocation and calling, leadership, and generations.

###

YOU LOST ME.

Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church...And Rethinking Faith

by David Kinnaman

Baker Books

PUB DATE: October 1, 2011