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TESTING THE FAITH

WorldNetDaily Exclusive

Why are 2 out of 3 young people leaving the church? Groundbreaking study says Sunday School makes exit more likely

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What does the age of the Earth have to do with the exodus of young people from American churches?

Ken Ham, known for his [Answers in Genesis creation-science ministry](#), says a major study he commissioned by a respected researcher unveils for the first time in a scientific fashion the startling reasons behind statistics that show two-thirds of young people in evangelical churches will leave when they move into their 20s.

The study, highlighted in Ham's new book with researcher Britt Beemer, "[Already Gone: Why your kids will quit church and what you can do to stop it](#)," finds church youth already are "lost" in their hearts and minds in elementary, middle and high school – not in college as many assume.

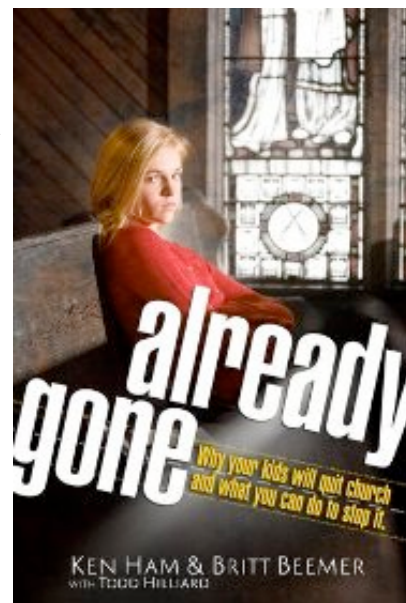
"A lot of the research already done has been to find out how many believe, how many support abortion, believe in the resurrection, say they're born again," Ham told WND. "But nobody has really ever delved into why two-thirds of young people will walk away from the church."

[Get "Already Gone: Why your kids will quit church and what you can do to stop it"](#)

The first-of-its-kind study by Beemer – a former senior research analyst for the Heritage Foundation and founder in 1979 of the [American Research Group](#) – included 20,000 phone calls and detailed surveys of 1,000 20 to 29 year olds who used to attend evangelical churches on a regular basis.

(Story continues below)

The survey found, much to Ham's surprise, a "Sunday School syndrome," indicating children who faithfully attend Bible classes in their church over the years actually are *more likely* to question the authority of Scripture.



"This is a brutal wake-up call for the church, showing how our programs and our approaches to Christian education are failing dismally," Ham writes in the book.

Among the survey findings, regular participants in Sunday School are more likely to:

- Leave the church
- Believe that the Bible is less true
- Defend the legality of abortion and same-sex marriage
- Defend premarital sex

The book explores a number of reasons for the findings, but Ham sees one overarching problem that is related to how churches and parents have taught youth to understand the Genesis account of creation.

Ham – who believes in a literal six-day creation that happened 6,000 to 10,000 years ago – says the church opened a door for the exodus of youth, beginning in the 19th century, when it began teaching that "the age of the Earth is not an issue as long as you trust in Jesus and believe in the resurrection and the Gospel accounts."



Ken Ham

"What you see in the Bible is that when there is compromise in one generation, and it's not dealt with, you usually notice it to a greater extent in the next generation," Ham told WND.

In previous generations, young people could live with this inconsistency, he said, but with an increasingly secular and atheistic public education system – where some 90 percent of church-going youth are trained – today's youth find it hard to see a connection between what they are taught in church and what they learn at school.

"Because of the way in which they've been educated," Ham said, teens come to believe "that what they are taught in school is reality, but the church teaches stories and morality and relationship. Bible teaching is not real in the sense of real history."

Now, as parents or leaders tell youth they can "continue to believe in evolution, millions of years," Ham said, young people are starting to see, "Well, I can then believe what I'm taught at school – but school has nothing to do with God."

The key issue is that this doubt about the Bible's account of origins causes youth to doubt the authority of Scripture, he said.

"Salvation is not conditioned on what you believe about the age of the Earth and the six days of creation," Ham said. "There are many who believe in millions of years and are Christians."

But the Genesis issue does matter, he contends, "because salvation does rise or fall on the authority of Scripture. The message of the Gospel comes from these words of Scripture."

When that Bible is undermined, he explained, everything it teaches is in doubt.

Ham's new book shows how young people can be given "answers to help them understand you can really believe God's word, that it "connects to reality and it's really a book of history."

Helping young people make sense of reports such as the [claim last month of the discovery of a "missing link" proving Darwin's theory of evolution](#) is Ham's specialty.

In a May 19 interview with WND, he pointed to a line in the scientific report about the discovery that countered the researchers' bold claims to media.

The fossil's species "could represent a stem group from which later anthropoid primates evolved [the line leading to humans]," states the report, published in the online journal Public Library of Science, "but we are not advocating this here."

The London Guardian newspaper also reported that scientific reviewers of the research asked that others "tone down" claims that the fossil was on the human evolutionary line.

"The reviewers said we don't know this is a missing link, and they asked the people who wrote [the newspaper reports] to tone it down," Ham told WND, "and yet we have this media hype claiming this is it, this is the missing link."



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