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LISTENING TO THE UNCHURCHED

"They have rejected the institution, not God, and we can learn from their concerns."

One of the distinguishing characteristics of effective churches in the 21st century is that they place a high priority on reaching unchurched people and frequently invest time and energy in "asking the customer." They conduct interviews, focus groups, and surveys that ask unchurched people in their community why they are unchurched.

Mecklenburg Community Church, near Charlotte, North Carolina, was begun in October, 1992. The church presently holds its three Sunday services in an elementary school until permanent facilities are secured. Of the more than 700 members, 80% were formerly unchurched and 50% became members through initial faith in Jesus Christ. Prior to the public beginning of the church, a survey of the area's unchurched population was conducted by the Barna Research Group. The survey posed a fundamental question: "Why don't you go to church?" The major results of the survey are as follows and used in *NetFax* with the permission of Dr. James Emery White, the church's senior minister.

1. **"There is no value in attending." (74%)** The unchurched felt like they could connect with God as easily, if not better, on the golf course as they could in a worship service. While interested in spiritual things, the unchurched do not feel that church has much to offer their spiritual pilgrimage. This verdict would be similar to McDonald's discovering that people wanted hamburgers but didn't think that McDonald's was a place to get one.
2. **"Churches have too many problems." (81%)** The reputation of the church among the unchurched is in shambles. It is believed that churches are inflexible, hypocritical, judgmental, and just plain mean. One man in the survey said, "I have enough problems in my life. Why would I go to church and get more?"
3. **"I don't have the time." (48%)** Time has replaced money as the new currency in contemporary American society. Rather than asking "how much does this cost?" people are prone to ask "how long will this take?" Sundays are, for many, the only day to "play."
4. **"I'm simply not interested." (42%)** A rather large number of people are simply not interested, for one reason or another, in attending church.
5. **"Churches ask for money too much." (40%)** Many feel that churches seem more interested in their wallets than in them as people.
6. and 7. **"Church services are usually boring (36%) and irrelevant to the way I live." (34%)** The verdict of the unchurched is that most services are boring and lifeless, with sermons that are irrelevant to life in the real world.
8. **"I don't believe in God, or I am unsure that God exists." (12%)** Many feel that the unchurched have rejected faith or God. In reality, they have rejected the church.

