

# Three Kinds of Church Members

By [Bill Tenny-Brittian](#) | August 22nd, 2017

<https://effectivechurch.com/three-kinds-of-church-members/>

A family left the church recently because they didn't like one of the changes in worship. The pastor had been confronted by the board chair who demanded the pastor "Go after them and bring them back." The pastor kept his cool and gently sidestepped the confrontation, but gave me (his coach) a call the next day.

"The family that left had five children. Two were active in our youth program and two were fairly regular in our kids' worship. But here's what I couldn't really say to the board chair. First, over the past two years, they had given exactly zero dollars to the church. Second, they came to church, sat in a pew, and did nothing else, other than their children went to their respective age-stage programming. And third, the parents are very needy. There's always some crisis they're dealing with and they want the church to intervene. To my knowledge, they've never asked for money, but they drip drama wherever they go. I understand the chair's desire to have them back because our 'numbers' just dropped, but I'm not real motivated to chase them down."

It seems to be that there are three classes of "church members." There are the Idle, the Faithful Consumers, and the Disciples of Jesus Christ.

## 1. The Idle

Paul warns the church about the idle on several of occasions. These are people who are parasitic. They "joined" the church, but all they do is suck the life-blood from the congregation and they give nothing back. Paul regularly chastised the church for tolerating the idle who were disruptive in the congregation.

Idlers "join" the church, but all they do is suck the life from the congregation and give nothing back. @billtb

Idlers are often at the heart of complaining and gossip, since they're not contributing anything else to the church and have lots of time to fill. (My grandma's favorite saying about idle hands being the devil's workshop is echoing in my head as I write this.)

### ***What To Do About Idlers***

First, Paul repeatedly says that the church is to warn them. And if they are disruptive, they're to be "avoided" by the rest of the body. I'll let you decide how far Paul intends you take that.

The second piece of advice isn't what to do, but what to *not* do. Under no circumstances give an idler a church leadership position in an effort to "cure" them of their idleness. First, it's unlikely that they'll be cured. They'll be as much of a parasite with the ministry team as they

are with the congregation. But second, if you give them a position then you've given them power. And an idle person with power is a danger to the church. If someone isn't investing in the church, they're not invested in the church. Don't give them a chance to scuttle the good works that your church is doing.

Finally, if an idler isn't creating an issue, then "leave them alone." Keep preaching the gospel. Keep inviting them to participate in Bible studies and prayer groups. Keep trying to model what faithful discipleship looks like. And keep praying for them. Hopefully and prayerfully they'll take a couple of baby steps into faithfulness. On the other hand, if they are disruptive, you may have to Matthew 18:15–17 them.

## 2. Faithful Consumers

To be honest, this is probably the majority of your church ... the vast majority. We're not talking the 80-20 rule here, we're talking the 96 percent rule. The 96 percent rule is simple ... the typical church member attends worship and a few other activities and pays what they think the church is worth to them and that's approximately 96 percent of the average, active church membership.

In most churches, approximately 20 percent of the church's membership are willing to step up and serve on committees, ministry teams, and volunteer. In the eyes of most church attendees, this 20 percent seems very committed, and they are indeed significantly more committed than the Idlers. However, in the end, their commitment is limited.

I remember when I attended church planter's bootcamp at the Church Multiplication Training Center in Colorado Springs, one of the presenters asked us, "What's the number one way you can tell if someone is committed to the new church?" Several answers were offered, but the presenter interrupted and said, "Their giving. And what's the number two way you can tell if someone is committed to the new church?" Again he interrupted our answers with "Their giving. And what's the number three way you can tell if someone is committed to the church?" By then we'd figured it out. "The giving!" we all replied.

Regular, sacrificial giving is the primary clue that indicates if someone is *really* committed to the church.<sup>1</sup> And since, only about 2 percent of church members in the US tithe, that suggests the number of really well-committed church members is a teeny-weeny number. So, I provide them another 2 percent grace and rest in the reality that only about 4 percent of a church's membership is totally committed to the church, to the kingdom, and to the ministry. The rest are in it primarily for what they get out of it and they support it with what they think the church's services are worth to them.

### ***What To Do About Faithful Consumers***

I wish I had a magic pill or even a foolproof formula that would turn Faithful Consumer Church Members into practicing Disciples of Jesus Christ, but I don't ... and I don't know of anyone who does. Instead, the only way I know to turn consumers into Christians is to disciple them in ways that transform their lives. To be fair, we've preached to them, with them, and at them for decades. They've attended Sunday school and Bible studies and prayer groups and small groups to no avail. And the only way I've seen a consumer church member turn into a Christ-follower is for another faithful Disciple of Jesus Christ to step up and mentor them one-on-one. And even then, it takes a long time to move a consumer into a self-sacrificing, cross carrying rather than card carrying Christian.

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### **3. Faithful, Committed Disciples of Jesus Christ**

It's said that Billy Graham once commented that he thought only about 10 percent of all regularly attending church members were actually Christians. I remember my evangelism professor responded by saying, "I believe Graham was an optimist."

Whatever the number, most churches have very few cross-carrying Christians, that is, faithful, committed Disciples of Jesus Christ who are faithful to the faith, to the church, and to the Great Commission. We've said this before in numerable blog posts and videos and books: a disciple of Jesus Christ makes more disciples of Jesus Christ. And if they're not making disciples of Jesus Christ, then they're not faithful, committed disciples of Jesus Christ. In fact, if they're not making more disciples, then they fall into the second group above.

Most churches have very few cross-carrying Christians. @billtb

It's a rare church that has a number of these disciples ... and those rare churches that have more than just a couple of them are not in decline because the faithful, committed disciples of Jesus Christ are busy growing the church by sharing the gospel, by sharing their faith, by investing in relationships with the Nones and Dones, and by ultimately contributing to the church's growing number of conversion baptisms.

#### ***What To Do About Disciples***

Love them. Support them. Encourage them. Help them make more of them. And at all costs, protect them from the Faithful Consumers and the Idlers who will do pretty much anything in their power to run them off because the faithful always make the rest of us look so very, very unfaithful.

For more information on how to turn your church around, check out the [Only Four Things Grow Churches DVD Seminar](#).

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1 Yes, there are a few, scattered church members who tithe, but do so in order to wield power. But there are other signs that these are Faithful Consumers rather than Committed Disciples of Jesus ... see Galatians 16 for details.

About the Author: Bill Tenny-Brittian



Bill is the Managing Partner at The Effective Church Group. He began ministry as a church planter in the early 1980s and over the past 35 years he's grown churches from one side of the nation to the other. In 2002 he joined Bill Easum's consultation group and began partnering with churches and church leaders to help them reach their fullest potential. He is the author of nine books and the editor of *Net Results* magazine.