

**Americans Open to Exploring New Ways of Experiencing God-1**  
**Barna Report, June 2009**  
**Summarized and posted by Bob Young**  
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A Barna report documents and explains what many churches already know and are experiencing. Finding and practicing religion through traditional churches is less and less popular. Our society has entered a time of individual personal exploration of “new approaches to marriage, communications, sexuality, education, and more”, including how people pursue their faith and how they relate to God and other people of faith.

**What People Are Saying about Their Faith**

***88% of American adults say that “my religious faith is very important in my life.”***

Any significant decline in spirituality or religiosity is overstated. Faith is not going away (or even diminishing significantly) despite media releases which suggest the demise of traditional faith practices and beliefs. Nine out of ten adults say that their faith plays a meaningful role in their life. Nothing on the horizon suggests this is likely to change in the foreseeable future.

***75% say they sense that “God is motivating people to stay connected with Him, but in different ways and through different types of experiences than in the past.”***

There is a growing sense of release from traditional religious practices in this country. People are suggesting that they want more of God and less of the stuff that gets between them and their relationship with God. This “stuff” often includes traditional church experiences.

***45% say they are “willing to try a new church.”***

Almost half of Americans are open to changing their church home, demonstrating their lack of connection with their present faith community and their desire for a more significant connection. This may reflect an increasing lack of loyalty to both organizations and personal relationships and a growing sense that there is always something better available if one can simply find it.

***64% say they are “completely open to carrying out and pursuing your faith in an environment or structure different from a typical church.”***

Two out of three adults contend that they are not tied to a conventional church setting as they seek to experience and express their faith, but are willing to explore new contexts, processes and structures.

***50% say “a number of people I know are tired of the usual type of church experience.”***

Survey respondents not only indicated their willingness to change churches or to consider different forms of church experience. Half of all adults said they are aware of a willingness to experiment on the part of others who are tired of the common church experience.

***71% say they are “more likely to develop my religious beliefs on my own, rather than to accept an entire set of beliefs that a particular church teaches.”***

Levels of distrust toward churches, church leaders and organized Christianity have been growing over the past two decades. Such distrust, along with a heightened independence of Americans and the increased access to information that has characterized the past decade, may have contributed to the current situation where a large majority of adults feeling responsible for their own theological and spiritual development. Other studies have shown an inclination

for people to view a local church as a supplier of useful guidance and support, but not necessarily a reliable source of a slate of beliefs that they must adopt.

The entire report is available at [www.barna.org](http://www.barna.org)

In the next article, we will explore what this may mean for traditional churches.