

1:4 self-identified evangelicals has not even accepted Christ as their Savior.

According to the Barna Group of Ventura, California (www.barna.org), a recent nationwide survey shows that 84 million adults (38% of those surveyed) who say they are evangelicals are:

- 60% less likely to believe that Satan is real
- 53% less likely to believe that salvation is based on grace, not works
- 46% less likely to say they have a personal responsibility to share their religious beliefs with others
- 42% less likely to list their faith in God as the top priority in their life
- 38% less likely to believe that Jesus Christ lived a sinless life on earth
- 27% less likely to contend that the Bible is totally accurate in all of its teachings
- 23% less likely to say that their life has been greatly transformed by their faith

George Barna Research 2007

When I read the findings above, I was floored. These are not mystifying theological questions. These are simple foundational truths—building blocks of Christianity I learned growing up. How can so many in America be so close to the opportunity of knowing God and His truths yet so far from believing them? Do we know what we believe and why we believe it?

In a land so blessed with opportunity and freedom, we easily take for granted our privilege of worship and religious practice. If we knew the value of this privilege, our actions would be very different. We see it every day in the lives of believers in other countries who understand and often pay the price for their Christian commitment. They go to great lengths just to hear God's Word read or spoken in simple truth. They sacrifice time and safety in exchange for whispers of prayer, whether alone or gathered together. And they know God's power—the very Power that resurrected Christ's body. Their fellowship with Him is unmistakable. They know what they believe and why they believe it.

How do we, with such freedom, come to know such value? How do we lead people from mere interest in Christianity to informed commitment and ultimately to a life impacted by Christ Himself? In organizational leadership, there are two basic questions to be considered: what are we doing and why does it matter? As the Church, we know why it matters. But do we know what we are doing? Research is an approximation, but we cannot ignore the implications. It is clear the Bible and all its truths must be taught. This generation of those who profess to teach it must learn to handle more accurately the word of truth and the ministry entrusted to our care (II Tim 2:15). Then we must walk with those who hear in this journey called life helping them to understand and apply these truths until they become spiritually mature. Lights, entertainment and cultural trends are not the answer. As one famous evangelical theologian wisely said to me: "Teach the Word, in its entirety, as it is written." Belief always comes before actions. May we be found faithful.

Jimmy R. West
Executive Director

MINISTRY FOCUS

Treasuring Freedom

Celebrating holidays, shopping with ample resources, socializing with friends, displaying symbols of belief with ease and protection, freely proclaiming religious faith...I am so grateful for the opportunity to be able to do all these things without worrying about being persecuted. I am more grateful for the fact that I can change my religion in America without worrying about being persecuted by the government.

I met a gentleman recently from Jordan that converted to Christianity from Islam. He was not allowed to go to the Jordan Evangelical Seminary. A law the government established for the seminary does not allow them to accept Muslim converts. He was imprisoned in Jordan and had to flee along with his wife to Syria. When the government in Syria discovered he was a convert, they put him in jail. He requested for an asylum and came to the U.S. on refugee status. He is able to worship God here freely and can better care for his family since he is a free man.

The freedom we have to attend a church freely and worship our Savior openly is something we should all celebrate and highly treasure.

Ruqaya Naser is pursuing a Master in Theology from Dallas Theological Seminary. She is involved in ministering to internationals from Muslim and Islamic backgrounds while teaching American Christians how to better understand and share their faith with people from these cultures. Her primary avenue for doing so is through Good News for the Crescent World and teaching evangelism classes at various churches in the Dallas area.

A few weeks ago, I asked our son's teachers if I could come to their classes to recite most of Dr. Martin Luther King's famous speech, "I Have a Dream." They both agreed. The word spread around the school and two classes turned into five (100 kids and 8 teachers including the principal). Before I began, I told them I memorized it for two reasons: First, I was required to read a book for a class about Dr. King. I thought he was merely an activist for civil rights. I discovered though that he was highly educated and his writings and speeches are insightful and profound and have impacted the thought of America. Second, Dr. King was also a minister who understood that we need God at the center of our lives to really see racial freedom and justice. We cannot do it alone. We need a higher authority.

I was unsure how the teachers were going to respond to my additional commentary, since there is a spirit of religious neutrality in the schools. But they loved it, and the principal was very interested in my personal remarks as much as the speech. We are hoping for more opportunities to talk with them further.

John Engberg is pursuing a Master of Divinity from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Chicago. He is involved in influencing Christian world views and empowering the faith community to influence secular culture through ministering in an evangelistic program as the World Impact Minister at Village Church of Barrington.

• • • • • Avenues of Giving

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SMI empowers the next generation of ministers to maximize their opportunities today in order to increase their effectiveness tomorrow.

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