

Scoffer, Slacker, Seeker, or Saint?

A Spiritual Census for Teens

By Daryl Wingerd

Every ten years in America a survey called a census is taken to determine the current number of U.S. residents. Other information is also obtained and used to paint an up-to-date economic, political, and religious portrait of our society.



What if a census were taken in your church's youth group? You probably already know how many teens are present from week to week, but what would a *spiritual* portrait of your youth ministry look like?

I think it is safe to say that each teenager in every local church would fall into one of four spiritual categories: scoffers, slackers, seekers, or saints. The following survey using these four categories could be given by a pastor or youth minister, or it could be completed privately by a teenager reading this article. In either case, I challenge the reader to review the four categories below and put an X in the box next to the one that describes him or her most accurately.

The Scoffer is the kid who comes to church (or at least participates in popular youth functions), but turns up his nose at the whole concept of becoming a Christian. His disinterest is readily discernible to those around him because his attention span only lasts as long as the food and fun. He's OK with the idea of "worship" as long as the music suits his tastes and the message of the lyrics isn't overemphasized. But to him the whole concept of surrendering his life to Jesus Christ seems outdated and out of touch with reality. After all (he thinks), life is to be *lived*, not devoted to worshipping some dead guy who supposedly came back to life.

The Slacker is the kid who dutifully goes to church and pays attention in youth meetings. He may even pray publicly and participate in discussions about the Bible when he is in settings where this is what everyone else is doing. He might be the kid who grew up in a Christian family, "received Jesus" and was baptized at a young age, and has gone on a short-term missions trip. Unlike the scoffer, the slacker will say he believes in God and the Bible. If he has enough natural boldness when he is around his peers at school, he may even admit to believing in *Jesus*. But despite these factors that might seem to prove that he is a Christian, the slacker lacks one essential mark of saving faith: He doesn't love Jesus Christ. Instead, he

loves the world and the things in the world, proving that "the love of the Father is not in him" (1 John 2:15). Apart from meeting the types of social expectations that are a part of being in a Christian youth group, the slacker is disinterested in Jesus yet passionate about _____ (fill in the blank with sports, movies, video games, the opposite sex or sex in general, music, money, clothes, cell phones, social or family acceptance, etc.). Passion reflects preference. The slacker's preferences for worldly things are like a billboard that says, "I *like* Jesus, but that's as far as it goes with Him. I truly *love* something else."

The Seeker is the kid who may or may not be attending church. He is not yet fully willing to give up his love for the things of this world, but he is decreasingly enamored by them and actively exploring the possibility that there is something much better. He is the kid who has been awakened to the disturbing reality that he is a guilty sinner, that his life is short, and that the afterlife is eternal. He finds himself drawn by the awareness that there is a God who is interested in the affairs of men, and who simply *must* be found. He is the kid who has come to the conviction that God reveals Himself through the message of the Bible, and he spends his time looking for Him there—*without being told to do so*. He may not know all that much about God, but he is convinced that God exists and that He is worth looking for. The seeker is not yet a Christian, but he is much closer to the kingdom of heaven than either the scoffer or the slacker.

The Saint (i.e., the true Christian) is the kid who has not only *sought* God, but *found* God, through repentance from sin and faith in Jesus Christ. He doesn't see himself as merely having met some traditional entrance requirement (like a special prayer or a baptism). He recognizes that God has made him a new person altogether. He has been "born again" (John 3:3). He believes God's Word to be unfailingly true (contrary to the scoffer), and he loves Jesus more than anything (contrary to the slacker). To him, the only life worth living is the one characterized by obedience to Christ, an ever-increasing knowledge of God's Word, and committed fellowship with other true Christians. Whatever other interests he may pursue in life, living his life for Christ is his only non-negotiable interest. The teenage saint is the kid who knows that there is no price too high to pay for the privilege of following Jesus, and no earthly treasure rich enough to be worth losing his soul.

So which box did you check? Most importantly, were you honest?

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