

BY PASTOR BOB REID

A recent survey done of unchurched people by LifeWay, an agency of the Southern Baptist Convention, asked people to respond to this statement, “Christians get on my nerves.” The result was that 72% “somewhat” or “strongly agreed.” On the other hand, those same individuals in the survey reported that 89% have at least one close friend who is a Christian. The report concluded, “A majority of unchurched Americans are turned off by the institutional church and don’t have a biblical understanding about God and Jesus, yet they believe Jesus makes a positive difference in a person’s life and would enjoy an honest discussion with a friend about spiritual matters.”

The survey gives a different view of Christians than the unchurched had in the early days of the church. Doctor Luke writes that in those days Christians “...were highly regarded by the people” (Acts 5:13). The power of the Gospel was so dramatic and dynamic that people were in awe of these who were followers of “the way” (Acts 9:2). The intersection of belief and behavior was so clear that people saw genuine Christianity in the lives of the early believers. A disconnect has arisen in our day between profession and practice, and perhaps the unchurched are more aware of it than the church.

LifeWay Research director Ed Stetzer noted, “A full 72 percent of the people interviewed said they think the church ‘is full of hypocrites.’” He added, “At the same time, however, 71 percent of the respondents said they believe Jesus ‘makes a positive difference in a person’s life’ and 78 percent said they would ‘be willing to listen’ to someone who wanted to share what they believed about Christianity.” I suppose one might conclude that the unchurched are not impressed with the way Christians behave, but they are intrigued with the impact of Christ and would be willing to hear more about it—especially if it was from a friend.

It is important for Christians to reach out beyond the sphere of the Christian community and develop meaningful connections with people in our world. As they see Christ lived in us, and as they hear our story of how God is making a difference in our lives, it forms a foundation for them to ask some questions about the “reason for the hope that you have” (1 Peter 3:15). This will happen if we have done what Peter says earlier in the verse: “But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord.” When Jesus is the ruling Lord of our lives, then He will be seen in our lives. That makes an impression upon the unchurched.

The survey reported, “Only 28 percent of adults 30 years and older said they think Christians they know talk to them too much about their beliefs.” So, don’t be afraid to talk about Christ with your unchurched friends. As Stetzer concluded, “Even though the unchurched have a confused view of God and a negative view of the church, they are overwhelmingly open to someone sharing about their Christian faith.” He adds, “We think religion is a topic that is off-limits in polite conversation, but unchurched people say they would enjoy conversations about spiritual matters.”

In this Easter season, take the opportunity to share with others what Christ has done in your life. We serve a risen Savior who died for our sins, has been raised from the dead, is alive, and can change the eternal destiny of those who respond to the Good News. That is a story worth sharing!

GETTING ON PEOPLE'S NERVES?

